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Issue 8 June 1991 £2.50

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JOE MONTANA

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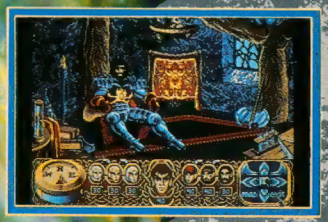

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STRATEGY PLUS

Number 8
June 1991

He who plays, wins

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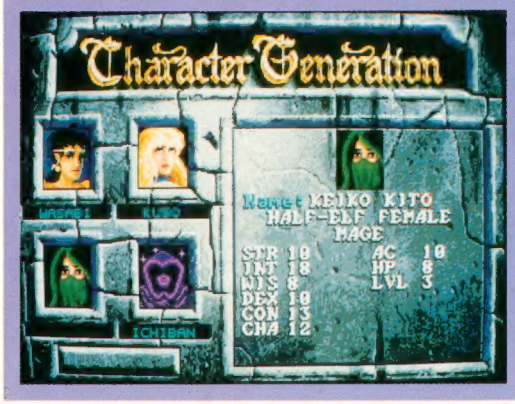

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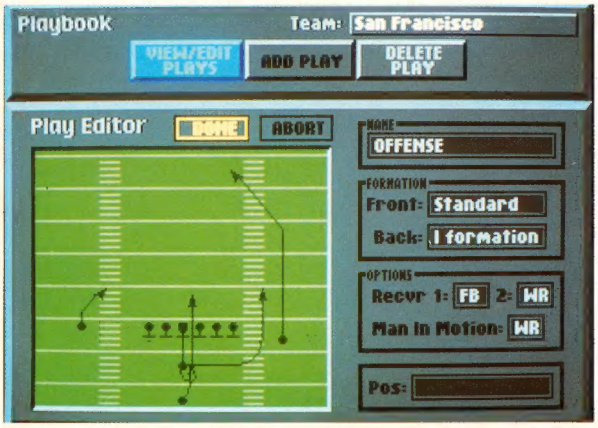

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CD here

In the trendy world of multimedia the news is confusing as ever. When Commodore first announced the release of the CDTV player the company's UK office appeared at a loss to explain exactly what it could do. 'It can do everything,' replied the head of marketing predictably. This was followed by statements along the lines of: 'This is our big chance, whatever we do we mustn't blow it,' which immediately gave rise to the thought that they were just about to. Sure enough, even before the machine has been launched Commodore has managed to antagonise many potential customers. First the company decided not to supply the independent computer shops, or, as their (un)sales manager Kelly Sumner put in inimitable PR speak: 'It is simply a fact that a corporate stance has been taken by the firm on this product,' going on to add, 'during the launch we don't want it (the CDTV) to be associated with computers in any way whatsoever'. Well, *excuse* us while we pitch all those Amigas that we've been supporting over all these years. Commodore's master plan is to flog the CDTV through Dixons and similar High St chains, probably because of the amazing point-of-sale knowledge that such stores are famed for. Now, however, they have changed their minds. Sort of. Here are the latest commandments from ration manager Sumner: he now says that indie shops will be allowed to stock the hallowed machine, but *only* if they obey certain criteria. They are: '1) The CDTV *must* (all italics ours) be given a separate area four feet (*measure 'em*) away from any computers. 2) The word computer must *not* be mentioned in any CDTV advertising. 3) The CDTV software stocked *must* include at least 20 non-game titles. 4) Staff *must* be put forward for CDTV product awareness seminars.' Gee! That's real big of you guys. I'm so honoured that you've agreed to let me buy your product. So what if I've got to rearrange my shop, buy product I don't really want, and lose my staff for a couple of days. Your wish is my command Oh mighty Commodore.

I wish the machine well, but alienating the people who are best equipped to sell it does not seem a smart move. Commodore see the CDTV as the natural follow up to the CD audio player with the mass market that implies. Hence the current obsession with image (the mass market apparently does not like computers). However there is a crucial difference between these two products, namely that CD players had a clear target market. Everyone knew what they did even before they came out; with a CD sticking needles were a thing of the past, plus the discs last forever. Two great selling points, and its arrival coincided with the birth of the yuppie. The CDTV has no such obvious selling points except to the computer buff, who, it seems, does not exactly fit the Commodore ideal consumer profile. Sure, the CDTV can play audio CDs, but why pay £600 for that function when you can get a dedicated machine that sounds a whole lot better for half the price? A computer buff can answer that question, but try asking a yuppie (if you can still find one). Commodore are emphasising the educational possibilities the machine offers, hence the dictum that retailers must stock non games software. Most of the software available initially will be the 'important' things like encyclopedias (yawn) and language programs (*adios*). Eventually all that well meaning stuff, so beloved by the image conscious marketing flunkies, will get flushed down the pan and Commodore will wake up to the fact that games sell hardware (as their own Amiga has proved), however unpalatable that fact may be.

Apple raising time

Meanwhile back at the orchard, Apple appears to have finally become aware of the fact that Mac users do not share the company's own snobbishness about playing games on their regal machines. (Maybe the staff have been to one of those consciousness raising course for which their home state is famed). At the recent Computer Games Designers Conference in California, Apple sponsored the reception – an action which is akin to George Bush recommending Havana for a holiday. On the home front, confirmation that Amstrad is to launch a new low end PC intended for home use adds a new *frisson* to the format war. No complete specs are available as yet, but it will come with a VGA colour monitor, a 286 processor, and with a price point under £700.

Slipped disc

Plans to feature a cover disc have had to be aborted for the time being due to technical problems. The price increase, however, still stands. To make up for this we hope to be able to add more pages at a later date. Sorry for any disappointment this may have caused.

Twin leaks

Our 'Twin Peaks' April Fool review in the last issue had quite a few takers, including some well known names. One such celebrity, who edits a totally wonderful computer section in a national newspaper, rang up to ask if he could quote from the review, and would I like to write a follow up feature for his newspaper. Closer to home, the head of one games company talked of buying new hardware just so he could play the game!

All that is needed now is for some company to go ahead and publish it. SP

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MERCHANT COLONY

Fair Trade

by Mike Woodhouse

IMPRESSIONS has released a number of strategy games in recent times, in fact hardly a month goes by without at least one such appearing. All are pretty, to say the least, and all offer a fair degree of entertainment.

Merchant Colony is another typical Impressions game, in that the theme is an old one, but one into which a good deal of care and attention (not to mention a degree of innovation) has been invested. The result is a colonisation and trading game which, despite the weaknesses mentioned below, is a worthy effort nonetheless.

To say that it has no weaknesses would, however, be misleading. Very few games can make the grade without some kind of goal set by the designer. **Merchant Colony** presents the player with the problem of setting his or her own targets, which can be enough to put some people off.

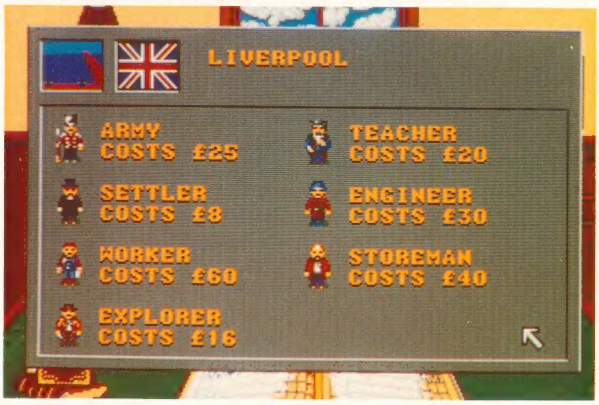
Pretty People

The game revolves around the establishment and subsequent development of colonies during the age of expansion into (particularly) South America and Africa. The player takes the part of one of the great colonising nations and must compete against the others for the wealth available from these far-flung outposts. He must purchase ships and hire colonists, telling them what to do once they've arrived at the destinations decided on. The graphics are pretty and the people wander about convincingly while they look for suitable places to exercise their specialties.

Employees fall into a number of types, principal among which are settlers who seek out agricultural locations, explorers who are mineral deposit seekers (and who can become mines when one is found) and soldiers who protect the colony from the ravages of hostile natives and unfriendly powers. In addition, teachers help to calm natives, storemen increase warehouse space (allowing more to be produced before a ship comes to take trade goods to market) and workers can transform raw materials into more valuable items.

Trade goods may also be purchased at established colonies around the world and sold at other ports for a profit. A display is available which allows you to determine where the best places to buy and sell are. The up side of trading is that it can be helpful in avoiding getting too deep into debt with the friendly neighbourhood bank manager. The down side is that it leads to more ships buzzing around to keep an eye on. This, by the way, is a real-time game, so there is a limit to the amount of elements which can be effectively controlled. Oh, and there are pirates to consider...

Three ship types are available: frigates, searchers and cargo ships. Frigates have little capacity and are primarily for dealing with pirates. Cargo ships have an excellent capacity and do much of the donkey work when a colony's established. Searchers are a kind of half-way house utility vessel.



Shortcut

Graphically the game is rich, the use of icons being enhanced very nicely. For example, from the 'desktop', in order to view the world map, click on a large globe. This starts spinning when the mouse pointer is over it. The mouse pointer, hum. Is it just me, or is there a world out there which would like a keyboard shortcut for commonly-used game options? I seldom see a game these days which has the option of using the mouse or the keyboard and it irritates me no end, particularly in a real-time game when I know exactly what I want to do but it's going to take two or three mouse movements and clicks to make it happen. For me, at least, it can make the difference between a game staying on the desk for easy access or going on the top shelf to gather dust.

The computer opponents in **Merchant Colony** aren't especially bright, although attacking another major power can make things a little hotter. I don't recommend this until a colony is very powerful and a lot of time can be spent ordering the inhabitants.

If this game has one major flaw it's in the exploration area. The map appears to be predefined, which means that once the resources in a given area have been found (which takes far too long initially, since a settler can't be ordered to keep moving until they find something), in subsequent games the player will be able to go straight to the goodies.

In general, this is a good game. Not an original concept but a pretty and original implementation. The user interface lets it down somewhat and the precision required when ordering smacks of a desire to get a video element into it (why can't I just tell a ship to 'come home and tell me when you arrive' without having to steer it that last few miles?). B-plus, can do better, and most probably will. SP

Designed by
David Leicester and
Edward Grabowski

Published by
Impressions

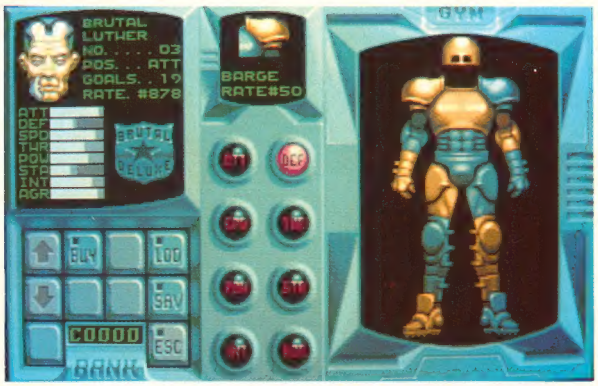
Price £29.99

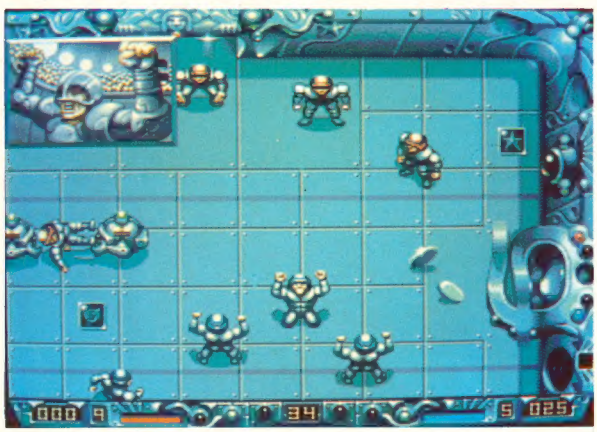
Available for ST and
Amiga
Reviewed on the ST

SPEEDBALL 2

Brutal De Luxe

by Brian Walker





ROLLERBALL meets gridiron is how the hoardings might describe this latest production from The Bitmap Brothers were it a movie. Like the former, this is set in a future of criminal sports leagues where aggression rules (KO) and human limbs are cheap.

Speedball 2 offers the player the unmissable opportunity of coaching and managing Brutal De Luxe in the new, improved Speedball League. The management side of the game is concerned with strengthening the squad either by buying new players, or improving specific attributes at the gym. Power, defence, and intelligence (!) are among the many qualities available at a cost. The credits available initially may be deployed en masse, or to individual team members.

It's A Knockout

In addition to the league competition there is a knockout tournament, though I'd recommend building up a strong team in the league (and then saving it) before trying this out.

The matches themselves consist of three minutes of frantic action. Scoring goals helps but injuring opponents also has its merits. Bonuses too are useful, they can even have the effect of doubling the score. These are gained by throwing the ball at the 'bounce domes' (2 points), or hitting the 'stars' (2 points each), while throwing the ball up the ramp activates a score multiplier. Unfortunately the packaging precludes the provision of a plan of the pitch so ascertaining what is where is not as easy as it should be. Instead, a 'souvenir programme' is offered. Nice, but useless.

Defence Spending

Scattered around the pitch will be various player aids in the form of discs. When picked up these can do wondrous things such as increasing the attributes of lads to a maximum ('Manic'), or make them immune to tackles ('Shield'). Coins are also dotted around the playing area. These will magically be deposited in the credit bank enabling new players to be bought. Last but probably not least, armour and weaponry can be found on the pitch. Indeed there is so much flotsam out there that there is something to be said for just running around picking it most of it in the first half, and then using it to beat opponents to a pulp in the second.

Although control of the players is via joystick, arcade skills are not a guarantee of success in this game. Control of the players is imprecise. Whether this is deliberate or not I cannot say, but the frustration in trying to get the controlled player to do one's bidding simply adds to the excitement. The game is at its best when played against a human being or John Harrington. Apart from the obvious pleasure derived in this mode, there is also a feeling of greater play balance. At first against computer controlled teams, Brutal de Luxe will be overwhelmed. For this reason I'd suggest spending a lot of the initial credits on defence, purely to keep morale up.

Gradually as the pennies come rolling in the team will improve and promotion to Division One should beckon. The league provides the game with a good structure, so it's unfortunate therefore, that this option is not possible in the 'human vs human' mode. Nor can teams be saved in this mode. All that is available is a simple 'best of three'.

Smart Looks

If **Speedball 2** is a nifty idea then the implementation is brilliant. From the glamorous front end with its charging technofunk soundtrack to the vendor shouting 'ice cream', this is a class piece of programming. The graphics are spectacular in every respect and the (literally) bonecrunching sound makes full use of the Amiga's sonic capabilities. The action packed matches would be enough but the management aspect gives the game play an extra edge. **Speedball 2** is a gutcruncher from start to finish. The Bitmap boys done well! SP

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The Bitmap Brothers

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Amiga and ST implementations by STeVeN Green

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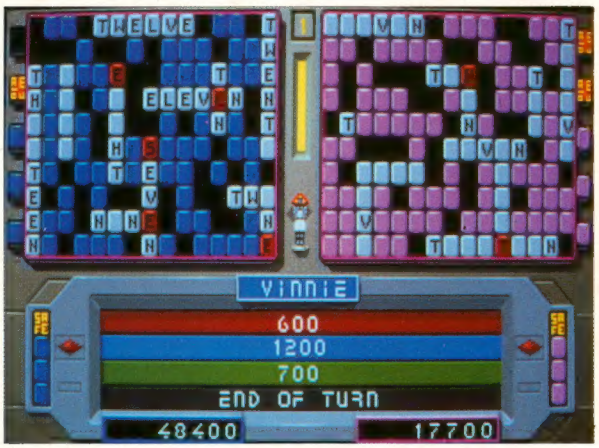
LEXI-CROSS

Game For A Laugh

by Brian Walker



THE YEAR: 2091. TV game shows have changed. But not by much. Take **Lexi-Cross** for example. The contestants, residing as they do in various parts of the galaxy, look a tad unusual it has to be admitted. The suspicion lingers, though, that their green heads and purple complexions are what really lurk beneath the hypernormal appearance of those sweet married couples currently appearing on a game show near you.

The game itself involves the unravelling of a puzzle concealed between a matrix of tiles. This in itself is pretty old hat. What lifts it out of the ordinary is the futuristic context in which it is set. The tiles consist primarily of letters. To get away from the potential boredom of a straight word game, the designer has thrown in a fruit machine and a whole load of special tiles.

Siren Call

The pre-show preliminaries are great fun. The hostess, Pristine Mint – a sexy siren with a twirling ankle and a penchant for steel tights, requests the age, favourite colour, and star sign (this game was designed in California) of the player. This is a one-off ceremony – the details are then stored in a database. Once this formality has been completed players may then customise an image of themselves. Most of the choices available make the *Alien* look like Tom Cruise. The first selection in the game proper will normally be the 'reveal tile' option. The letters themselves are never actually revealed in this phase, instead a silver tile reveals itself indicating that a letter will eventually appear there. Other tiles include lose turn, save turn (protects against the former and other negative tiles), and various plus and minus point values. Point values are important, but not as important as solving the puzzle itself.

Fruit Shoot

An interesting tile is the 'reveal row' symbol. When this is upturned it is possible to display an entire column of tiles albeit very briefly; memory must do the rest. When enough silver tiles have been flipped it is prudent to pay a visit to the fruit machine. This spins around in the time honoured manner. It may come to halt opposite a particular point value. The player then has a (very) limited amount of time in which to select a letter. If the chosen letter coincides with any of those present underneath the silver tiles on the matrix, then the player scores the point value times the number of any such letters present. These letters now form a permanent display on the matrix.

The fruit machine, of course, does not always churn out glad tidings. The worst news is 'bankruptcy' whereby all points hitherto acquired disappear down a black hole. Gradually more and more letters appear until one of the participants decides to 'go for it' (to use archaic parlance). A new screen then appears which contains hints to the puzzle at hand, but only the letter currently appearing on the matrix will be revealed in the hint. Thus the hint is something of a puzzle in itself. If the puzzle is successfully solved then the victorious player adds the score of the opponent to their own. The overall winner is the player with the most points at the end of three rounds.

The implementation of what is basically a simple game is what makes **Lexi-Cross** a winner. The futuristic game show context provides a perfect counterpoint to the dryness that is usually associated with word games. The game is at its best when played against a fellow human, or 'The Living vs The Living' as the manual would have it. The computer opponent has no real option but to 'cheat', though the level of such cheating can be varied. The documentation is pretty mediocre. There is a nice strain of humour running through the manual (and the game) but it often obscures important information. This is compounded by the shoddy production values transplanted on it by Electronic Arts UK. The shrunken box (from the American edition) bears further witness to this. The lack of a 'save game' option is mildly irritating, though the game does not take long to complete (about three hours or so).

Let these carps not deter you, though, if you are considering buying **Lexi-Cross**. It is a very entertaining game as well as having long term play value. The basic game comes with 625 puzzles, and Interplay plan to release expansion disks which will feature things like movie trivia and pop trivia, though because of the subject matter some of these may be restricted to a US release only. SP

Designed by
Peter Oliphant

Published by
Electronic Arts

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STRATEGY PLUS

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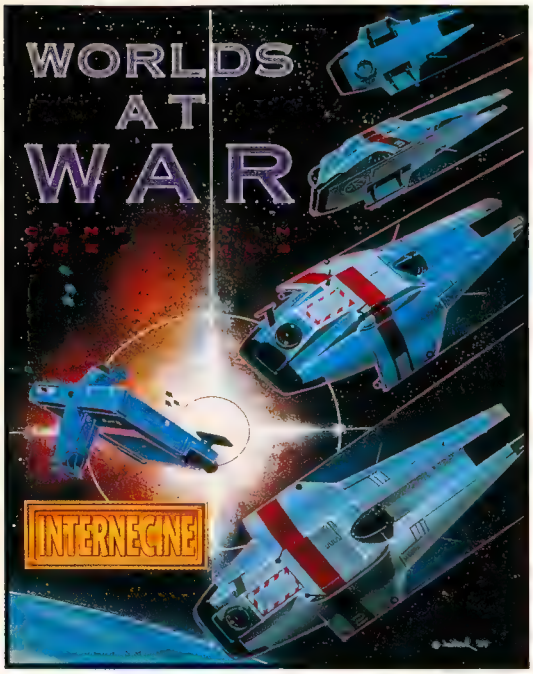

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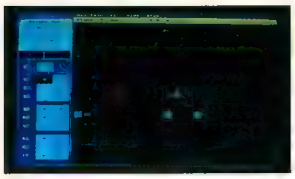
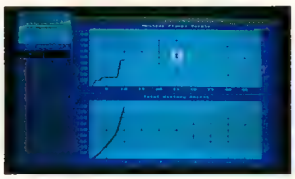


Naval map showing production/flight level allocation and hyper-space connections between planet systems



Victory screen showing neutral planets taken by both sides and total victory points for both sides

"Worlds at War" is a game of real strategy for one or two players. It's a game of naval & amphibious combat, on a galactic scale. Simple in concept, 'Worlds at War' can be played in an hour as a small, tactical study with the flavour of a chess game; or for a weekend, as a campaign game with vast regions of territory to explore, huge fleets to manouevre, and neutral planets to conquer

The scrolling battle map can be configured for any size from 10 x 10 through 50 x 50. The size of the map profoundly affects game length & strategy.

Pieces represent base planets, neutral planets, task forces of different types, bomber formations, missile barrages, scouts & marine landing craft. You start the game with a certain number of production points & build a fleet based on the strategic requirements of the randomly generated star map. A small trickle of supplies will reach your base planet each turn, but the game is primarily one of tactical combat, not production.

Other Features:

75 page manual, *covering gameplay & discussing: "How to attack neutral planets", "Three Suggested Strategies", "Developing a Scouting Plan", and "Massing vs Dispersion".*

A Victory Point Graph *lets you assess your play and plan your moves. It displays neutral planet points and total points for each turn of the game.*

A Full Map View *gives you a snapshot view of the battle. Map controls enable you to highlight the different components of your fleet.*

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Full game save, *including auto-save*

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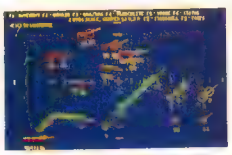
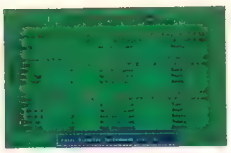


Battlelines engaging, while destroyers lay smoke.



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WARGAMES

A BRIEFING

Oriental history simulated: Koei's Nobunaga's Ambition 2

WARGAMING was probably the first form of (non abstract) hobby gaming. With the advent of the board wargame in the sixties, entire weekends were soon being lost in a cardboard haze. Games were often left set up for months. The cat soon became the gamer's natural enemy as entire armies were crushed by a stray paw. Gradually the dusty bookcase boxes and the curiously affecting counters that lay within fell prey, like the dinosaurs of old, to evolution. In this case, electronic evolution.

Once programmers discovered that computers were good for things other than churning out mail shots, the code was on the wall. The save game facility sounded the death knell for the cardboard stacks. The advent of the chip meant that it was no longer necessary to hope that your opponent would show up. Suddenly there was a ready made enemy. So what if it was useless and non human? Diehards complain that they miss the tactile nature of boardgames, and that they can't see the whole map. No one has ever been heard to say that they miss thumbing through mountains of charts to check the line of supply.

This survey is not meant to be a definitive guide – we have concentrated on games that are still in print. Also, because of the constantly evolving technology, games that only run in CGA have been given the push. There are no longer any good reasons for graphics not to match the game play.

Most wargamers seem to have specific areas of interest. In recognition of this we have structured the article chronologically according to period. There will be some complete reviews, though in the case of games already fully reviewed we will refer you to the appropriate issue.

The Abstracted Mixture of Strategy and Tactics: Brøderbund's Ancient Art of War

ANCIENTS

Ancient Art of War (Brøderbund) – Star roles for Sun Tzu, Genghis Khan, Crazy Ivan, and many others in this abstracted mixture of strategy and tactics. Comes with a campaign generator – full review issue #2. **Ancient Battles** is a recommended simulation containing five scenarios representing famous battles circa 326BC to 451AD – full review issue #2. The historical simulations, focusing on oriental history, published by the Koei Corporation (Infogrames in Europe) are all highly recommended. These are: **Bandit Kings of Ancient China** (reviewed issue 3); **Genghis Khan** (reviewed issue 4); and **Nobunaga's Ambition II** (reviewed issue 7). **Centurion – Defender of Rome** is more a sort of Carry On Pillaging than anything resembling a wargame. Terrific graphics and sound offer some compensation. Full review issue #1.

Annals of Rome (PSS) is a strategic solitaire wargame of low level complexity *(writes John Harrington)*. The player controls the destiny of the Roman Empire with the aim of maintaining the empire against the barbarian hordes for as long as possible. Player actions consist of assigning generals to armies, shuffling troops around from province to province and, the fun part, invading regions and annihilating the populace. Generals are rated according to military ability and their loyalty to the senate (or emperor). A disloyal but capable general put in command of a large army can cause debilitating civil wars while a loyal but inept general can lead even the mighty legions to a disastrous defeat. Fortunately a coup does not end the game, and sensible policy over the next few decades can generally revive the empire's fortunes.

Play is rapid – it has to be to cover 1500 years or so of action – and oddly compulsive. The legions, man for man, are more than a match for anyone except the Carthaginians, and the temptation is to throw your weight around. However, overstretching leads to undermanning of the frontier states and leaves the empire, and occasionally Rome itself, vulnerable to an offensive by the barbarians or rival powers such as Greece or Persia. The only things missing from an otherwise brisk and absorbing game are tactical and diplomatic elements. Although there is only one scenario, the 'historical' scenario, the game has ample replay value. Recommended.

COHORT

Fighting For Rome

by George Campbell

COHORT – Fighting for Rome is a miniatures-style wargame much like **Rorke's Drift**, which Impressions also produced. The setting is somewhat different but the game mechanics are similar, though of a higher order. If you enjoy playing **Rorke's Drift** I'm certain you'll like **Cohort**.

Cliff Hanger

Set in the four centuries up to 200 AD **Cohort – Fighting for Rome** concentrates on an engagement between two Roman armies. The composition of each army can be varied as appropriate, but the minimum possible is 2400 cavalry and the maximum 9600 infantry. There are no attacks on fortified camps or towns, but there are four general types of combat and details of 20 scenarios.

Objectives are generally determined by the choice of terrain: open field, cliff defence, hills, and the bridge. Defence of the cliff area is probably the easiest introduction to the **Cohort** system. This is especially true as the enemy must do most of the work, and it is possible to win by doing nothing whatsoever. For the most part combat is a matter of force on force, awaiting a suitable opening so that the enemy can be destroyed in detail.

Details of 20 scenarios are provided, five for each of the terrain types. They may only loosely be described as scenarios because they are really lists of the units involved, rather than pre-set battles. Normally each side is chosen from one of eight standard compositions, or by fielding troops from the basic unit list.

Asterix

There are seven distinct troop types: light, medium, and heavy infantry, archers, light, medium and heavy cavalry. Units representing either 100 infantry or 50 cavalry are deployed on the battlefield. These units may be further grouped into formations of eight, making manoeuvres much easier. The troops are rated according to attack strength, defence strength, missile power and morale. Unit characteristics can be viewed at any time during play. Individual units are displayed in a somewhat cartoonish manner, and though this is understandable I would have preferred abstract unit symbols.

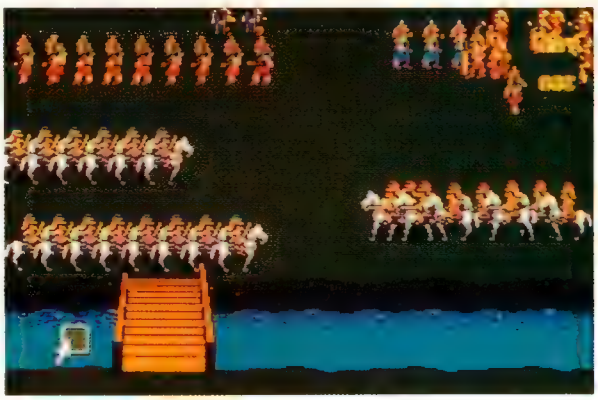
As up to 96 units can be deployed on each side the group command is a convenient means of moving masses of troops without having a heavy mouse workload. Formations of eight units are subject to a single order. It has the drawback of causing lone units to wander off whilst the remainder are embroiled in conflict. Movement in eight directions is possible for units given separate commands, but this is limited to four directions for group commands. Three speed levels are used: march, run and charge, though it is not apparent whether sprinting into combat confers any disadvantage in terms of troop fatigue.

Defender Of Chrome

It is unlikely that the entire battle will be fought in real time so the facility for quick resolution of movement or combat exists. While in fast forward the player is provided with constantly updated casualty figures. Once things start to get out of hand it's wise to step back into the commander's shoes, to hear again the sounds of death and mayhem. Even without the quick mode it is still possible to conclude a battle in less than two hours.

The enemy force will not usually follow a standard battle plan, so it is essential to establish a sensible strategy. Enemy movement is fluid, and the enemy troops retain a relatively coherent formation. It is particularly important to become familiar with the principles of archery as effective use of missile troops can sap an enemy unit's strength, while neglecting them can be very costly. Troops may be eliminated as effective fighting units by being forced to flee, routed, or simply annihilated.

One drawback is that the opposition can occasionally be unimaginative, reducing the challenge considerably. However, the artificial intelligence is normally sufficiently skilled to cause endless trouble. Whatever the foe, it doesn't usually take long for a mass engagement to become very confused. The strategic map isn't always helpful, and should only be used as a rough guide. It is fairly difficult at the best of times to tell friendly units from enemy ones. It would be very useful to zoom over the battlefield at will, but it is only possible to catch a glimpse of events on the ground.



Cohort – Fighting for Rome offers the capability of playing a miniatures game with a computer, without too much in the way of detail. The main advantage is that no tabletop is required, but it suffers from the absence of a three-dimensional aspect. I'm not convinced that such a system works but given the popularity of **Rorke's Drift** I imagine that it will sell well enough. SP

Designed by
Edward Grabowski

Published by
Impressions

Price £29.99

Available for ST and Amiga
Reviewed on the Amiga

WAR OF INDEPENDENCE

Ed Beaver's **Revolution '76** (Britannica Software) is more of a political game than a wargame in the conventional sense of the term. Although very enjoyable to play the linear victory conditions and its solitaire nature mean that the replay value is extremely limited.

NAPOLEONIC

Borodino, along with its counterpart **Waterloo**, features the highly idiosyncratic game system designed by Dr Peter Turcan. **Borodino** restricts itself to the eponymous scenario *(writes Dave Morris)*. The player is put in the not insubstantial role of Napoleon whose function it is to send orders to his commanders which are then filtered down the command structure. It is colourful and it does feel like a real battle – like having to watch helplessly as Ney makes a hash of things over a mile away. Reports come every fifteen minutes which makes the game a lot more enjoyable as this enables the player to understand *why* things happen the way they do, rather than just sitting back as a nonplussed spectator. The unusual command system is more likely to attract students of military history rather than the conventional wargamer (see also **Gettysburg**, reviewed this issue).

The **Ancient Art of War at Sea** – full review issue #5 – features Napoleonic period sea battles.

Commander's Eye Vie: Waterloo

AMERICAN CIVIL WAR

SSG wins the volume war here with its Decisive Battles series. The game system, with its diffuse movement system, is not for everyone. For attention to detail though (each game comes with a good quality colour map), and a smart AI, these simulations are hard to beat. **Volume 1 – Bull Run to Chancellorsville**, comes with six scenarios, while **Volume 2 – Gaines Mill to Chattanooga**, features five different battles. Both games come with the Warplan and Warpaint programs, which enable scenarios to be edited and the graphics customised. Somewhere a program exits for GDW's boardgame **A House Divided**. Just as it was about to be published the company itself became divided and went bust. The game's current whereabouts are unknown.

REBEL CHARGE AT CHICKAMAUGA

by Mike Siggins

REBEL CHARGE at Chickamauga is a development of the highly regarded Gettysburg system from SSI, the grandfather of computer simulation gaming. The game covers the battle that represented the last major offensive by the Confederate forces, commanded by General Bragg. Ranged against him were the Union forces under General Rosecrans, who were attempting to take Chattanooga, the South's railroad centre.

SSI has chosen to depict the battle at the brigade level and include all the features that one would expect at this level such as command control, fatigue and senior leaders. The battle itself revolves around two important geographical features. Firstly, the dense woods of the area which meant that neither commander knew where his opponents lay at any one time and secondly, the eponymous Chickamauga Creek. Chickamauga is Cherokee for 'River of Death' and that was to prove prophetic when the two forces clashed in September, 1863. The game covers the two day battle in two hour turns.

The game system is pretty straightforward in that the forces (infantry, cavalry and artillery) are depicted as either icons or symbols within squares as opposed to the usual hexes. The board covers 54 by 64 squares so there is plenty of room for manoeuvre, restricted only by the close terrain mentioned above. The nicest feature is that you can set the game's parameters to reflect different player handicaps and there is also an option to play with hidden enemy forces which is highly recommended for the fog of war benefits. The map is viewed either in strategic mod,e which is an overall picture of your positions, or in the 'zoomed in' tactical mode which is used for movement, firing and identification of units. This works acceptably well and these functions are effected by the mouse or shortcut keyboard commands. The handling of units is detailed and sometimes a little complicated but allows for such subtleties as facing and column or line formations. Using the menu system, units can be checked for their current strength, morale condition, disruption level and all those other important things that a commander needs to know.

Play balance is pretty good overall. Victory points are earned by either causing losses to the enemy or by capturing guns and objective squares. The Union forces start at the top and West of the map and have to advance South and East to capture

continued opposite

Rebel Charge... continued

the fords and bridges over the creek. The rebels start in the South and need to grab major road junctions and the exits to the North of the board. Troop quality is quite varied but is roughly on a par. The forces are broadly balanced between all three arms, with the Union having a slight edge in artillery, and the Confederates a 2:1 advantage in cavalry.

Chickamauga's graphics are nothing special; the map looks very much like a throwback to the early eighties. The rest of the screen design isn't too bad and information is neatly and clearly displayed. The manual is well written and has a passable set of historical notes and strategy tips which so many games of this type are lacking.

While by no means a bad game, **Chickamauga** blazes no trails and has no innovations that I can readily spot. It is really the classic 'series' release and everything about it says 'eminently workable, but uninspiring'. It also suffers from a somewhat antiquated system compared to the likes of **Fire Brigade** and even SSI's own **Red Lightning** system. At the end of the day, it is the movement and administration functions that have to be smooth to make the game interesting and **Chickamauga** doesn't quite make the grade. It is clumsy systems like this that prompt traditional boardgamers to denigrate computer versions of their favourite topics and unless something radical is done by the majors, that could remain the case for some time to come. Evolutionary gripes aside (as SSI are by no means alone here), **Chickamauga** is a good, well balanced game using an established and no doubt familiar system. SP

GETTYSBURG

C'est Magnifique, Mais C'est Un Jeu?

by Nicky Palmer

IT IS THE early climax of the American Civil War, as the Confederate thrust into the Northern heartland is parried by a huge but poorly-organised Union army. Subordinates have been given their orders, and are now keenly scanning the battlefield. Progress has been made against the first key hill, but a critical flanking assault seems to be under heavy counterattack. Reinforcements are ordered: off goes a messenger. Further messages are sent asking for details of the battles that can be seen and news of the ones out of view.

And now the wait. The battle proceeds: forces advance and retreat. A messenger arrives: an hour ago, the commander of the hill assault asked for artillery support. Three hours ago, a commander out of sight advanced south two miles. An order to the guns to fire on the hill would have been issued, except that the attack already seems to have been repulsed.

Commanding View

It would be nice to give new orders to the distant force to exploit their success, but the HQ would need to be moved to see what's happening. Meanwhile, the counterattack has driven back friendly forces so reinforcements will be marching into an enemy-held position and it's probably too late to stop them. Frustration! That's the **Gettysburg** experience. It will be familiar to anyone who has played its spiritual parent, **Borodino**: unlike most wargames systems, the 'BattleScapes' concept underlying this series of games places the player firmly in the role of the supreme commander; only seeing what is visible from the current position, unless the cheat option is used allowing a full view. Otherwise only messengers can provide the info, unless you use another cheat option to see all messages. Orders can only be given to immediate subordinate commanders, for them to pass on, and by the time the orders arrive they may well be meaningless in the current context.

The showpiece of the game is certainly the graphics. The VGA graphics provide a remarkably attractive view of the area in front of the HQ, with clearly-distinguishable hills, towns, streams, rivers, roads, earthworks, and forces of both sides with their leaders and messengers on horseback.

Order 'Look S' or any other direction and the appropriate view is provided; move the cursor with the mouse or arrow keys and press enter for a statement of what can made out, such as: 'It looks like Benners-Hill, with some disorganized infantry of Anderson's division.' Distant forces are identified by type but it is not possible to make out which unit they belong to. Move the HQ every half hour and views can be obtained from the new position. At night, the sky and landscape darken. It's a magnificent achievement in projection, and gives the system a flavour quite distinct from more traditional wargames like SSI's, which tend to simulate a map rather than a battlefield.

Note, though, that the view is static. If a force advances, it will simply observe next turn that it's now in new positions: actually seeing divisions marching into the assault will have to wait for further advances in technology. The only 'action' on screen is an optional scattering of artillery explosions over troops under fire: having this on slows resolution slightly, but provides a visual indication of where the enemy is firing.

The game comes with a handsome four-colour glossy map of the battlefield with a write-on/rub-off pen, plus paper maps showing the starting positions of the two scenarios.

Tell Smith to Tell Jones...

Orders are given by a realistic but verbose system reminiscent of text adventure games. The recipient is al-

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Dr Peter Turcan

Published by
ARC

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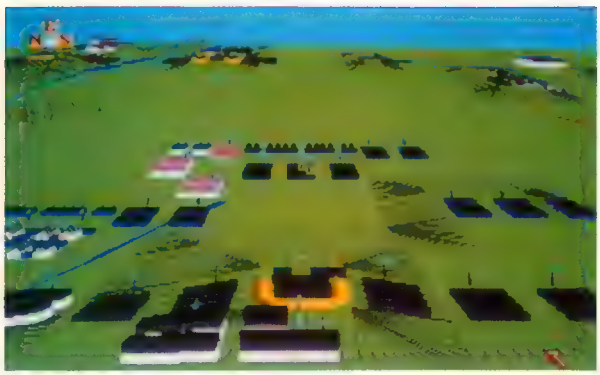


ways a corps commander, though the choice exists of giving him detailed instructions for subordinates ('Hancock, order Caldwell to attack 1 mile south of Newton') or just giving general directions ('Ewell, form an attack line from the east flank to Gettysburg linking with Hill'); the latter is often better, since it is unlikely to be able to control the battle in detail as it unfolds, so the corps commander will be happier if he hasn't been given specific orders to single units: when he dashes off to look at another part of the battlefield, he'll have trouble deciding what do with Caldwell after the attack was over.

Orders go by messenger and arrive quickly if the HQ is near the recipient, otherwise not; communications from the centre to the flanks can take several hours each way, making it almost impossible to give sensible commands to the flank commanders.

Smart Parser

The text is intelligently parsed, and if a mistake is made (saying 'instruct' instead of 'order', for instance), the order will remain on screen with a cursor showing the word which baffled the system. Abbreviations of names and places are accepted if unambiguous: for example, Culp rather than Culps-Hill.

If a text entry system is desirable at all, than this is the way to do it. Opinions vary among the gamers that I've canvassed: some value the 'atmospheric' effect of having to write 'real' orders, others get tired of typing them. Certainly a small sacrifice of realism would make life a lot easier: a menu of the available corps commanders and sub-commanders followed by a menu of order types would help a lot.

I'd also like to be able to order lower-level leaders directly, and have the computer play aide-de-camp and route it through the appropriate corps commander. The Union player especially finds himself constantly checking the order of battle to see which corps commander he has to talk to in order to refer to a particular unit. Having lots of small corps thus makes the Union significantly more tedious to command, though orders may arrive faster as the commander will tend to be closer to his units. Eight orders can be given per half-hour turn, though there's no warning when more are issued.

This Is A Rulebook?

The rule book (a pretty A5 booklet) is, frankly, weird. After the briefest of introductions, no less than 14 pages are devoted to a historical description of the battle. Next come a few notes on the map, then installation and start-up instructions, and a guide to the graphics. A few basic orders follow, a note on moving the HQ, and a page on how to win, which states that points are acquired for inflicting losses and taking objectives, but not what the objectives are (this is never specified except as 'pushing the front line forward'). That's the end of the main rules, with as yet no description of how to play.

Now comes Appendix A, showing the differences from the **Borodino** game (better graphics using VGA, a turn per 30 minutes instead of 15). Appendix B leisurely chats about historical reading. Appendix C, finally, describes the order system, with examples, and Appendix D shows the historical orders which can be left in place (or changed if desired) to start the battle. Next comes the 12-page order of battle, plus more historical notes on weapons and battles in the Civil War.

What most gamers would call the main rule book consists, in fact, of Appendices C and D! Moreover, the rules are decidedly skimpy in several areas, leaving it to guesswork to find out, for instance, what happens if an HQ is caught in a battle (answer: it becomes disrupted and cannot give orders), how long the scenarios last (both start on the second day at different times, and play into the third), and other details which a board wargamer would expect as a matter of course.

No Slugfest

Some of these omissions might be explained as designed to let the player explore and discover, but it seems downright unrealistic that it is impossible to find out what the objectives are or what they are worth, except by constantly checking points counts before and after seeing a location captured, hoping that nothing else has been captured off-screen to distort the calculation). Overall, the design gives the impression of being more influenced by miniatures wargaming, with its emphasis on weapons and tactics, than by the operational/strategic ideas of board wargaming: **Gettysburg** is not quite a simple slugfest, but bashing enemy units is the key to victory.

The design is a technological triumph. The concept gives a probably realistic picture of the frustrations and tantalizingly partial information of Lee and Meade historically. The atmosphere is convincing. Players who are happy just to participate in a persuasive computer simulation of the battle and see events unfold around, may well be delighted by **Gettysburg**. But as a *game*, it really has serious limitations. On my 386 AT clone (25 MHz), response time is swift (except for telescope observations) so long as the standard rules are adhered to, but these provide a strictly limited and generally outdated view of what's happening. The best chance to decide the course of the battle is to alter and improve on the original pre-battle orders.

Ebb And Flow

If the cheat options are pursued – allowing map views anywhere and getting a report of all orders as they come and go, a much better impression of the ebb and flow of the battle is obtained. This comes at the cost of markedly slower response time: each message lingers lovingly on the screen for 5-10 seconds before the chance arrives to move on to the next. Sickles wants Randolf's battle report. Pause. Sickles wants Birney's battle report. Pause. Birney has retreated south 1 mile. Pause. The frustration of ignorance is replaced by the frustration of delay.

Given infinite time, I'd like to explore the system completely, eventually finding out exactly how all the orders work in practice, and perhaps developing a skill in using direct orders from a nearby HQ to turn the course of battle. Failing a huge research effort of this type, I'd recommend **Gettysburg** more as an enjoyable, evocative experience than as a game. SP

ZULU WARS

Towards the end of the last century *(writes Mike Woodhouse)*, when large parts of the globe were still painted pink, a small company of about 100 British soldiers were massacred by 40 000 Zulus at Rorke's Drift in southern Africa. Now those magical moments can be relived *(shouldn't that be re-*died *– Ed)* in Impressions' **Rorke's Drift**. Unfortunately, there is no chance of playing the Zulus...

This is as unlikely a subject for a computer wargame as I can imagine. There are no possible ways to get out alive, as the manual states. The goal is to last as long as possible as the British are slowly whittled down under weight of numbers. Most of the battle took place through the night, so perhaps it is possible to keep going until morning. I wouldn't know: all my attempts have ended in annihilation within the first three or four hours. For a game with such a grisly topic, **Rorke's Drift** is nicely presented, even to the point of being cute. Because of the small number of men at the player's disposal (and believe me, it soon gets smaller), information is provided on each individual, and they can be ordered as individuals. Different men have different skills, so there is a lot of scope for optimising resources. It would have been nice to have this information in printed form, by the way.

Each soldier can be instructed to perform a number of different actions including movement, resting and firing in one of a number of positions. To speed things a little, groups of soldiers can be assigned the same order, although the method of doing this is a little cumbersome. All control is exercised through the mouse. This is an unusual wargame and should appeal to wargamers looking for something different.

Cute death at Rorke's Drift

WORLD WAR 2

This is the area most dominated by boardgames conversions, the most meticulous of which are **Blitzkrieg – Battle of the Ardennes** reviewed issue #5 and **White Death** reviewed issue #4. Both these games were based on GDW titles. **Storm Across Europe** has been dubbed 'son of **Hitler's War**', a reference to the Avalon Hill boardgame. A full review of this strategic level game appears in issue #1. The Russian Front has been well served by simulations. SSI's **Second Front** is a classic of its kind, though not one for the novice. The strategy articles published in issues #6 and #7 should give you an idea as to whether or not they are for you. SSG's **Panzer Battles** is not one of their best games. The map is cramped and unattractive while the large icons, representing units, lend the game an almost ab-

FIRE BRIGADE

by Mike Siggins

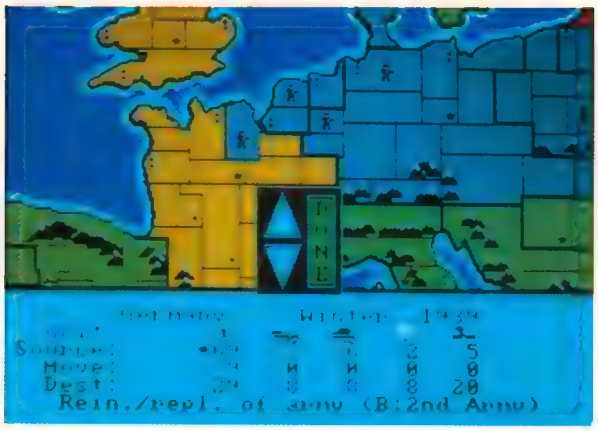
FIRE BRIGADE is a strategic level simulation of the Battle of Kiev, designed and programmed by Panther Games of Australia with an assist from SSG. The packaging includes an excellent eighty page manual. The tutorial game supplied with is short, but thorough. From then on, however, the learning curve is steep. The advanced game introduces all sorts of features like hidden units, air support and superiority, intelligence, reinforcements, supply, and fatigue. Three scenarios are provided. These will last between four and eight hours when played to the end, though they will frequently finish much sooner.

A notable aspect of **Fire Brigade** is that Panther has taken the brave step of casting off the unnecessary constraints of hex boardgames. The area around Kiev is portrayed as a normal map with commendably clear detail. In addition, Panther has supplied a card map giving the overall view of the sector. The divisional units are neatly overlaid on the screen map making the combined effect not dissimilar to a Field Commander's operations chart.

Fire Brigade puts the player in the position of a General or Field Marshal with the emphasis firmly on command. There is a choice of playing either the Germans or the Russians. A two player option, and a modem option are also provided. The feel of the game is of being in overall control of a 'front' without knowledge of the enemy's true position or strengths, This makes for an excellent 'fog of war'.

At the start of the game 'day' it is usual to check on the troops numbers and morale. Using the mouse, each divisional HQ unit is given 'general' orders such as attack specific units or towns, or defending. Having issued commands, movement and combat are then resolved. This happens dynamically on the screen and, while one is powerless to change events, it is fascinating to watch it all unfold. Armoured divisions make breakthroughs and drive deep behind enemy lines, infantry divisions stand immovable, while the seemingly ever present SS and Russian Guards threaten whenever gaps appear in the lines. The computer plays a decent game and shows no sign of 'cheating'. The feel of the game is excellent and can be frustrating for all the right reasons. SP

Armour deployment in Fire Brigade



Holiday for Norman: Storm Across Europe

stract feel and detract considerably from the flavour.

The desert would seem to be a location that abounds with tactical opportunities, though Sodom Hussein would doubtless disagree. Strange than, that not many games have sought to exploit this. The best of a slender bunch is **Rommel – Battle for North Africa**. The packaging in this is absolutely top class: a first class colour map and a manual containing extensive historical notes and strategy articles for each battle. In all there are 8 scenarios provided ranging from the 10 turn Tebourga Gap, through to the 76 turn Maknassy. The former is an excellent introductory scenario and can be finished in under one hour. The graphics in EGA are more than adequate making this a highly recommended package both for beginners and experts. **Vulcan – The Tunisian Campaign** is another good example of a desert wargame, but the CGA graphics limit its appeal to the truly dedicated.

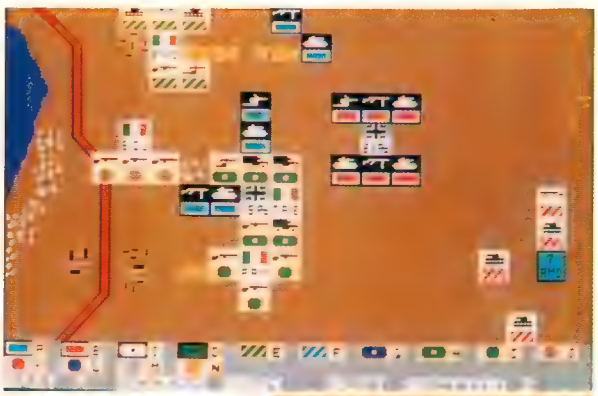
In the tactical field we have **Frontline** from CCS. If **Storm Across Europe** is indeed the son of **Hitler's War**, then **Frontline** is the twin brother of **Squad Leader**. Unfortunately the implementation does not come close to capturing the excitement of the boardgame. The essence of squad level games is player identification with the units, an aspect which **Frontline** singularly fails to capture. Much of the game's flaws can be put down to the graphics which fail completely to evoke any sort of atmosphere.

When it comes to naval simulations of the period there is only one game in it. Fire off that 21 gun salute for **Action Stations** reviewed in issue #1.

MODERN

Harpoon really set the standard for wargames with an interface and database the like of which had never been seen before. The AI was not so clever but with so much going on, *and* the scenario editor which followed later, this did not seem so important. Check out the strategy article in issue #4 and the battleset reviews in issues #6, #7 and #8.

Overrun, which deals with small unit combat in Europe and the Middle East, was favourably reviewed in issue #2. If there was a choice between dying painfully or playing PSS's **Conflict Europe** I'd choose the former.



First impression of Afrika Korps

Afrika Korps

The latest wargame from Impressions is the Ken Wright designed **Afrika Korps** which builds on the system he used in **Blitzkrieg May 1940** (reviewed issue #3). The game itself allows the player to take either the side of the Afrika Korps or the eighth army, the objective being to win the battle of North Africa.

Impressions make great claims about the artificial intelligence which allows the player to delegate tactical command to divisional commanders. As always with desert warfare, good supply is the key to success. **Afrika Korps** will be available in June for the ST, Amiga, and IBM PC.

MAIN BATTLE TANK: WEST GERMANY

by Mike Siggins

MAIN BATTLE Tank is a simulation of company level armour tactics in modern day Germany, published by Simulations Canada. There are several scenarios supplied, most of which give the one or two human players the chance to command a force composed of tanks, heavy weapons, and attack helicopters. The player gets the choice of either side and whether or not to play against the computer, which plays rather well, or another human. It is also possible to let the computer play itself: unusual, but quite useful to see how the game develops. There are numerous options available within the scenarios so the game offers plenty of play value, and if you exhaust these there is a scenario builder provided.

MBT is the classic board/computer game hybrid. In this type of game, the program supplied on disk is usually entirely text based and acts as the game 'controller'. The program accepts parameters and orders from the players, often through menus, and responds with text information (using grid coordinates) which is marked on to one of the two paper maps provided. This is done with counters or, in this case, chinagraph pencils. The board monitors the position of your forces and suspected or confirmed locations of the enemy gleaned from reports issued by the computer. The advantage of this system is that the designer does not have to worry about on-screen graphics or map scrolling code and the consequent memory

continued opposite

RED LIGHTNING

by John Inglis

SSI's **RED Lightning** offers the player the chance to take the role of Commander in Chief of either the Warsaw Pact, or NATO forces in a Third World War confrontation across Central Europe.

The game system is the same format as most boardgames of this type, with a 25 km hex map, a variety of terrain to modify movement, and counters are used to represent units. On top of this the designers have added a level of complexity by including such things as weather to affect aircraft efficiency, sub-unit breakdown and variable sub-unit readiness.

The game is fairly simple to set up as you are offered a screen of options. This allows sides to be chosen, solo or a two player game, the season the campaign begins in, scenario, length of scenario, competence of the troops, and so on. A chemical weapon option is also available. The designers recommend a simple start leaving many of the options to computer control until you get the basic hang of the game. I would endorse this, as I chose a complicated initial setup and ended up being soundly thrashed by 'pushover' rated Pact opponent.

The game is menu driven which can be tedious as it takes quite a few keystrokes to get from one menu to the next. The ST version uses a mouse which would probably speed up play. To manoeuvre ground forces the Full Hex Report menu must be accessed, from there the readiness of sub-units amy be adjusted. They can be put into either 'rest', 'reserve' or 'forward state'.

continued on page 27

useage. The free RAM is made available to the program, thus allowing more sophisticated text routines. It also means you can go to town on the map graphics which will always be better than their on-screen equivalent. The drawbacks are that text displays seem a bit old hat these days, and it is also essential to watch the screen closely to see what is going on.

Chunky Bar

Because of the hybrid approach, **MBT**'s components are pretty sparse. There is one disk, two high quality plastic covered boards and two pencils. The real meat of the game is on the disk – a chunky 176K of program that runs very quickly and which seems bug free and crash proof. The manual provides a precise guide to playing the game and explains what all the codes and menu choices mean. The designers are big fans of the limited intelligence concept and the idea behind **MBT** is to put the player in the commander's seat. The typical scenario starts with a choice of friendly forces and deployment. After that, units are given suitable orders and then there is a brief pause before the action starts. If you are defending, pretty soon the radio waves begin to crackle with reports of enemy sightings. Outposts of your forces come under attack and they try to send radio message back to HQ. Where possible they try to state the composition of the enemy force. This would all be fine if the radios worked all the time and the information were reliable. Nothing is ever that easy. Units can exaggerate reports and radio messages can be jammed, distorted or just fail to appear at all. This is what makes the game so fascinating – you never know exactly what is going on.

As the battle develops, companies call in for reinforcements and are given reports on how the helicopters and forces are getting on. The status reports are useful and advise just how tired the troops are, what their morale is, whether they are low on ammo, or just plain knocked out (ie dead). The action tends to be stop-start in nature as you defend frantically, hopefully drive the Russian horde back. It might then go all quiet only for the assault to start somewhere else. The 'feel' is excellent as you rush round and try to plug the gaps in the line. Reserves are essential here, as is the timing of their commitment.

Creamed

This sequence carries on until either side packs it in or achieves the victory points level. This usually happens after about an hour or 90 minutes but game saves are possible if required. It is also possible to end a game prematurely and then see who is winning at that point. When the game is over, there is a neat section called the post mortem which shows troop performance and gives a resumé of events.

MBT is a good game as long as you are not one of these gamers who likes to see and know everything that is going on. The action can be confusing at times and the NATO side will often be greatly outnumbered – just like the real thing. The feel of the Fog of War is excellent. For these reasons, it is a hard game to play well. Games tend to be short and deadly and require intense concentration. The maps quickly get filled with red arrows and markings as units retreat and counterattack. My only tip learned so far is to keep your HQ units on the move as if the enemy locates them, you get creamed.

Simulations Canada have probably got the balance spot on in **MBT**. It is an interesting game and is some way down the road towards becoming the ultimate command control simulator. The program is well written, the game plays quickly. To get the best out of the game one would need to be more knowledgeable about the subject matter, but it still represents a notable challenge for gamers with a fringe interest. SP

WAR DOWN UNDER

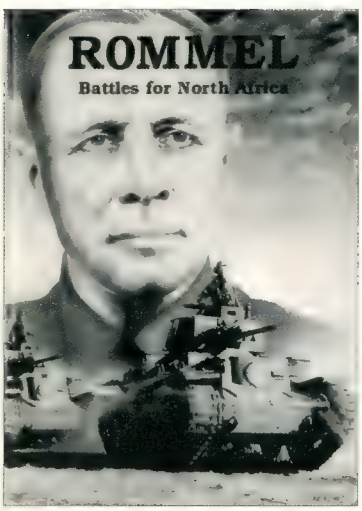
Stuart Mitchell talks with Gregor Whiley of Australia's SSG

Let me open by saying that I have played your games ever since 1983. ***Reach for The Stars*** *was the first computer strategy game I ever played and I still thoroughly enjoy it. I blame all of you for many hundreds (thousands?) of hours spent staring at my computer monitor. I'd like start off by getting a little background from you. When and how did SSG come to be?*

Gregor Whiley: SSG started as a partnership between Roger Keating and Ian Trout. Roger had already programmed a number of successful games for SSI. Ian was the proprietor of a military bookshop in Sydney. Their first project together was the instant classic strategy game, **Reach For The Stars**.

SM: What factors do you think make for a good computer strategy game? And what distinguishes SSG games from other strategy games?

GW: There are many factors to consider. We try to detail important factors, and ignore or abstract those which aren't relevant. For example, there are no supply rules in **Warlords**, because they aren't right for that sort of game. That consideration has been abstracted into the unit maintenance cost, so there is still an important constraint on fielding armies. We create systems which reward strategically or tactically correct play, and punish incorrect play. Strong AI is essential to making that distinction, and just as essential for providing lasting play value. That's why people can still play **Reach For The Stars**.



We try very hard to avoid letting in cheats, tricks or generally sneaky play, which avoid the intentions of the game system, and which take a lot of the honest fun out the game. If we do find such things, we fix them.

Strong AI, reward for good play, the robustness and ease of use of the system, and lasting play value make for the best strategy games. Including construction as well as destruction, where appropriate, is also very important. We put all those elements in our games, but the AI is probably the single factor which most distinguishes our games from other strategy games. This is because the AI is designed in with the first byte of code, rather than just tacked on to the end of a game.

SM: Construction sets have been a major part of most SSG releases in the past. Will that be true in the future?

GW: We will continue to provide as much user control in our games as possible. Allowing users to edit numerical values is no problem. Allowing them to edit the increasing amount of non-map graphics that games now demand is a bit harder, but we will do it. *Run 5* magazine, where we publish extra scenarios for our construction kits will remain an integral part of SSG's games.

SM: ***Warlords*** *has been a real hit in the States. Recently it was named the* Hot *game of the month on CompuServe. Were you surprised at its reception?*

GW: SSG's games have always been exceptionally well received whenever people have been able to get hold of them. **Warlords** has managed to overcome some of the distribution barriers, and we were relieved more than surprised at the way it has managed to do this.

SM: Who is Steve Fawkner and how did he come to be a part of SSG?

GW: Steve Fawkner is a programmer for a large Australian company, who lives in Melbourne. He approached us with a fully working version of **Warlords**. This was not up to our commercial release standards, but it was obviously a good game. We redid the user interface, reworked some simulation elements and put in all new movement and AI code to make a complete game.The result was a great collaborative effort, and a large phone bill.

SM: Will we ever see ***Road to Appamatox?***

GW: The appearance of games like **Road to Appomattox** depends entirely on the fortunes of SSG. At the moment, a wargame system can just about break even. A one off game like **Road to Appomatox** is financial suicide. However, unlike a lot of other companies, we will continue to do wargames. SSG is a small computer game company in an era of increasing consolidation.

SM: You publish strategy games, traditionally much less popular than other genres. Have you ever thought of making other types of games like, say, SSI?

GW: We cannot deny the temptations of the big dollars to be found in other areas of computer gaming, such as the ubiquitous FRPGs. We would only do such a game if we thought we could do better than the current crop. Since we have healthy collective egos, this possibility cannot entirely be ruled out, but we have no such plans at the moment.

SM: How big is the Australian computer game market? Do you derive the majority of your sales from the States?

GW: The Australian computer game market is quite small compared to the US or European markets. We rely on the US for most of our sales, with the Europe increasingly important.

SM: You have had incredible problems getting adequate retail

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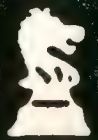

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Hex-free gaming: Panzer Battles

distribution for your games. Do you see some light at the end of the tunnel?

GW: We would hope that the success of **Warlords** will lead to distributors and large retailers getting the message about all of our strategy games. If they stock them, they will sell. There has definitely been a positive response to **Warlords**, and we are encouraged by this.

SM: This next question is a bit technical, so my apologies to all the non-hackers out there. I have studied some AI techniques and wondered if you employed any of the standard textbook techniques in your excellent AI programming?

GW: Roger's AI techniques are entirely his own. He has not found a single instance where classical AI techniques are appropriate, and has instead built up a large body of his own routines, which are continually being improved and upgraded.

SM: What are the next games up on deck for SSG? Would you mind giving some tentative ship dates for them?

GW: Our next release on IBM will be the 16 bit version of **Carriers at War**, which is scheduled for July/August. Our next Amiga release will be the long awaited **Halls of Montezuma**, which will be available by the time this is published.

*SM: Could you tell me a little more about **Carriers at War**? I have heard rumors that SSG is giving this one a complete overhaul for its 16-bit release.*

GW: The 16-bit **Carriers at War** will look completely different to the original 8-bit version, with lots of hi-res VGA graphics. However, the essence of the game will not change, because **CAW** was, and still is, a terrific game. The new version will have a full mouse interface, and it will be much easier to give orders and assimilate information. The user will also have more control over factors like CAP and submarines. **Harpoon** proved that there is a great demand for naval combat games, and its success has greatly encouraged us.

*SM: Your catalogue mentions **Supercarriers at War**. Is this an enhanced version of **Carriers at War**?*

GW: **Supercarriers at War** was the working title for the 16-bit version of **Carriers at War**. It is a fair indication of just how good we intend to make the game, which will now be

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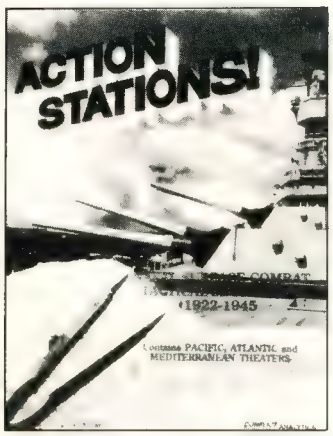
NOMINATED WARGAME OF THE YEAR

by *Computer Gaming World* magazine



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'NAM 1965-1975

Purple Days And Green Berets

by Brian Walker

DESPITE the tactical nature of the Vietnam conflict, there have been remarkably few games on the subject. The best was probably Victory Games' **Vietnam** – a monster boardgame that had more charts than Gallup, and one that inadvertently caused gamers to swap cardboard for silicon. The only software to approach the subject was the long gone **Conflict in Vietnam** from Microprose.The reasons for this reluctance to tackle the subject are numerous. Perhaps the main one is that America does not like to be reminded of wars that it lost. AAmerican software houses were loath to touch this game when it was put to them, not least because many of their employees were actively involved in the conflict. A guarded welcome then to **'Nam**, and to publishers Domark for making this foray into what appears to be an unpopular and thus neglected area.

Break On Through

The player is presented with a choice of three scenarios and also a campaign game which encompasses a political element. To start off I chose the Khe Sanh scenario where the objective is to prevent the NLF occupying the Khe Sanh plateau while at the same time 'decimating enemy units'. The first of what were to be many problems occurred when it was discovered that Khe Sanh had not only gone AWOL from the documentation, but also from the on-screen map itself. I could only assume that it was the province that I Corps were occupying. But even then, where exactly is the 'plateau' that needs to be defended so vigorously? And also, just how many NLF units had to be 'decimated' before victory could be claimed?

The game runs in real time and combat occurs when opposing icons overlap. Combat resolution is not properly explained in the manual, only that it is decided by a 'complex formula'. Even worse, as it transpired, players are not given any combat results! There is a rat-a-tat-tat of machine gun fire to indicate some sort of conflict is occurring and then nothing. Movement allowances suffer from a similar vagueness – units do not have any sort of specific movement allowance. The manual advises that 'foot troops move faster than mechanised troops in mountains, jungles and paddies', however, as no terrain key is provided this information is next to useless. As an experiment, I instructed units to move in the general direction of the VC and then just let the scenario roll. Some 45 minutes later I was advised that the 'pacification program' was successful and that I could count on increased

These effect the units command strength and its resupply ability. Control of this area is very important and takes considerable practice. I'd recommend experimenting with readiness initially.

Once the forces have been prepared they may be moved. There are two options here: travel mode whereby units move to the 'front' or away from it, and manoeuvre mode which can be used to attack the enemy or offer support to friendly units. A slight anomaly occurs in movement; the inability of units of different (though friendly) nationalities to pass through or occupy the same hex. This leads to problems in organising co-ordinated attacks or defence, mainly because the units are represented by counters of the same colour! If this is intended to simulate the confusion of war it certainly works.

Having moved all troops and performed any attacks the computer will then calculate the results, giving a blow by blow picture. Losses are represented by percentages. Troops will then either retreat or be removed from play, or 'stand' if damage is slight. Each turn represents 12 hours so losses do appear high. The computer then calculates supply nets and adjusts the combat strength of the units proportionately. Victory is determined by the relative morale of each side. Whenever a unit is destroyed or a city captured, that nation's morale will fall. Should it reach zero then the remaining forces of that country will be removed from the theatre of operations. It therefore becomes imperative to withdraw damaged units from combat to allow recovery.

Options in the game include air operations, which initially is best left to the computer. The air operations screen is nicely produced giving a picture of the aircraft together with its combat strengths. Planes may be assigned to different tasks, including air superiority, close air support, strike, and recon. The strike option covers airfield suppression, rear area harassment, and direct attack on ground forces. Unfortunately there is no choice over where the enemy forces are hit, so the pressure on units facing massed attack cannot be relieved. It is hard to determine how much the airforces affect general combat, but it is imperative that they not be overused as readiness levels drop rapidly.

In summary, **Red Lightning** is a well produced game. The manual is comprehensive and gives easy to understand instructions on how to play the game. It also includes clear descriptions of the combat strength of the equipment being used together with algorithms used to formulate the various modifiers and combat. A useful reference chart for units icons and terrain effects is also provided. This has a map area on the back which can be used to locate the POMCUS reinforcement hexes easily (these will need defending if the enemy breaks through). Moving around the play area takes some getting used to but this comes with practice. The play balance of the game is good, and there are a number of ways to adjust it in order to compensate for your own ability (or lack of). The designers provide plenty of advice on gameplay, but leave a lot to be discovered. This helps to keep the game fresh as the learning process is continual. The game gets an unhesitating recommendation to traditional wargamers, but bear in mind that even a short game can take up to 20 hours. SP

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In the Tet Offensive, which was one of the other scenarios provided, victory is achieved by 'defending towns and by destroying communist forces'. It is hard to imagine victory conditions more vague than this. What towns? How *many* enemy forces? Neither of these two scenarios warrant the term 'games'. They are little more than the sort of simplistic programs of the sort you might see at an army training camp.

American Prayer

The campaign game, with its offer to emulate the achievements of Tricky Dicky Nixon and Loony Bins Johnson, looked more promising. In this the player decides the level of troop commitment and military spending.

The Johnson scenario kicks off in 1964 when, to most Americans, Vietnam was just another of those god forsaken places where you couldn't get a decent hamburger. And even worse, half the country was run by commies! Although various strategies are touted for correcting this state of affairs, the victory conditions again suffer from the same vagueness that plagued the strictly military scenarios. The communists will win if they hold Saigon for three months or 'if they capture a large enough proportion of the South Vietnamese population (about two thirds)'. Americans win by 'stopping them doing this for 10 years or by capturing the same amount of population'. Exactly how you 'capture population' or exactly where this population might be found is never specified. The Designer's Notes in the manual refer to 'Population Control' implying that some sort of graph is available when in fact it isn't, though, confusingly in the same section mention is made of 'SVN Stability' for which there *is* a graph.

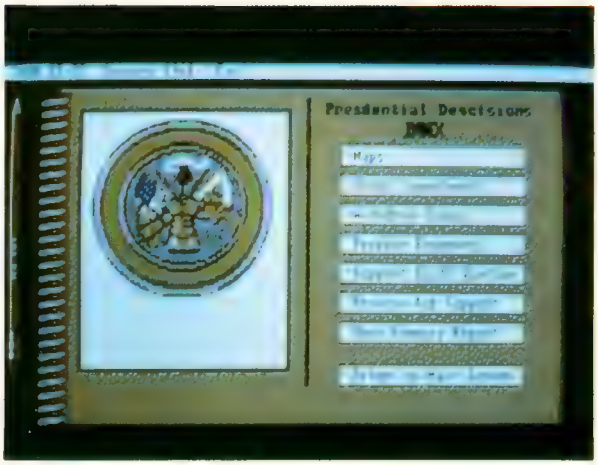
The problem of population is compounded by the map itself which offers a sort of generalised picture of South Vietnam. Towns are not denoted and cities are inadequately defined (where do population centres begin and end?) all of which is pretty dumb considering the emphasis the game places on the capture of the population. There is a diagram in the manual which provides a sort of 'rough guide to Vietnam', but this is wholly inadequate and in no way dovetails into what is offered on screen. A paper map might have done the trick but instead Domark provide two posters which concern themselves primarily with the pictures of photographer Tim Page.

The manual looks as though it has been written for the Mac version as there are constant references to 'buttons'. The screens depicted also differ. This is not so bad, but the differences in terminology create confusion. On the troop commitment screen, for example, the manual suggests 'that the player can select the units by dragging them into a box in the dialogue box', where 'an adviser will give advice as to how the selection will go down with the public'. On the Amiga and PC versions at least, no such 'dialogue box' exists.

The Unknown Soldiers

No distinction is made in the manual between the Johnson and Nixon scenarios so it was assumed that the former involves the full campaign game, while the latter is a sort of halfway house. However, as it transpired *no* troops had been committed in the Nixon scenario when the game opens. And this is supposed to be 1969? The player's task, as president, is to balance commitment to the war with domestic popularity. The political side of the game is quite well handled, though the actual implementation leaves something to be desired: the unit information in the manual does not coincide with that on the 'commit units' screen – different id #s are used. Also, there is no report available showing just how many units have been committed thus far. This is a crucial omission as troop commitment is at the heart of the game. The military side of the game is handled in much the same way as in the aforementioned scenarios, and as such, is woefully inadequate.

As if all this wasn't enough, the game crawls along even when set at 'medium' speed on the Amiga. If the 'fast' option is selected the screen flicker caused by scrolling becomes irritating. If the Amiga version of the game is disappointing (to say the least) then the PC version is a catastrophe. Although time is a great factor in the game, no dates are present on screen nor is there any kind of warning that the end of year (and thus crucial reports) is nigh. You can hit 'Alt D' and this will give you the date as well as the game speed, but this is clearly unsatisfactory. The game starts up in 'pause mode', something the manual does not see fit to declare, so you could sit twiddling your thumbs waiting for something to happen. In one scenario what *did* happen was that units appeared in the South China Sea, and no, they were not



Marines. The 'Alt T' key for 'time' does not work, but more seriously neither does the space bar which should scroll through stacked units. This, and the lack of sound when units engage (and this is the *only* indication of combat remember) renders this version worthless.

When The Music's Over

Frankly, there are so many problems with this game it's not so much knowing where to begin as to where to end. Even without all the aforementioned confusion the game itself is severely lacking. The absence of any proper combat system (let alone combat reports) is an odd design decision to say the least. It makes troop deployment a lottery as there is no reliable indication as to what is working and what isn't. The lack of a precise map upon which movement could be regulated and population centres clearly delineated, turns the political side of the game into mindless number crunching. To say that the designer's reach exceeded his grasp is an understatement. Were it not so trivial, **'Nam** could be accurately described as a simulation in that it is almost as tragic as the war itself. SP

Designed by Matthew Stibbe

Published by Domark

Available on all formats
Reviewed on the Amiga and PC

PC version supports EGA and is key disk protected

ODDMENTS

UMS II comes with three scenarios: ancient (Alexander), Napoleonic, and World War II. In addition there is a Desert Storm scenario which enables users to find out what would happened if the Iraqis had decided to fight. There is a 1.2 upgrade now available which corrects some of the speed problems, and also an upgrade for the Alexander scenario that exterminates bugs when running it with the 1.2 version. The Planet Editor should be available as you read this. A full review of **UMS II** appeared in issue #5.

Armies of the World unite: Desert Storm scenario for UMSII

Command HQ is also the subject of an upgrade. This was meant to be a sort of brain transplant for the AI. Unfortunately it turned into a lobotomy as all it does now is cheat. Highly recommended if you have a modem (any such person looking for an opponent can use our free classified section). Full review of this game in issue #5.

On the up and upgrade: Command HQ

NEXT ISSUE

REVIEWS:

Medieval Lord

Cardinal of the Kremlin

'Robosport

Champions of the Raj

FEATURES:

The ABC of PCs

COMING SOON

SSI is working on an Arab/Israeli wargame provisionally titled 'Jihad'. This will be based on the 1973 skirmish which will use the **Red Lightning** game system. Gary Grigsby is expected to finish his Pacific wargame this autumn which will use a similar design to his own **Second Front**. Ed Beaver, who programmed **Revolution '76** is working on an American Civil wargame for SSI, while Martin Campion's **Medieval Lord** is due any day now.

SSG is radically updating its **Carriers at War** previously only seen on 8-bit. The new version will feature a 'Harpoon-style' interface. **Operation Overlord** from the same company should also be finished this year. No news of any more **Harpoon** Battlesets from Three Sixty, though they are rumoured to be working on **Patriot** which will be a 'land based **Harpoon**'. Avalon Hill claim that the one meg ST version of their classic boardgame **Third Reich** is 'finished' and that other platforms will follow 'shortly'. Still with Avalon Hill, work on converting the solitaire naval boardgame **Tokyo Express** is now well under way. Expect to see this early next year. Another naval wargame that looks to be top quality is **Struggle for Guadalcanal** from Internecine, who brought you the aforementioned **Action Stations**. Look out for this in November. SP

SSG interview, continued

called by the original name. It will be out on IBM around July/August.

*SM: What's the latest on **Operation Overlord**?*

GW: Things are less certain with **Overlord**. It will either go down in scale, and become a sort of divsional level game, or will go up in scale and become an all of WWII in Europe game, including all of Russia and North Africa. Since we don't know exactly what it will be, I can't really give a realistic release date.

*SM: **Reach for the Stars** is one of my all-time favourite games, and one of the few that has stood the test of time. It is truly an amazing game considering the fact that it is essentially a 48K 8-bit game. Will there be another strategic space game from SSG?*

GW: We will eventually do another strategic space game, that will be bigger and better than **Reach For The Stars**. With what we now know, it will be an absolute killer game. SP

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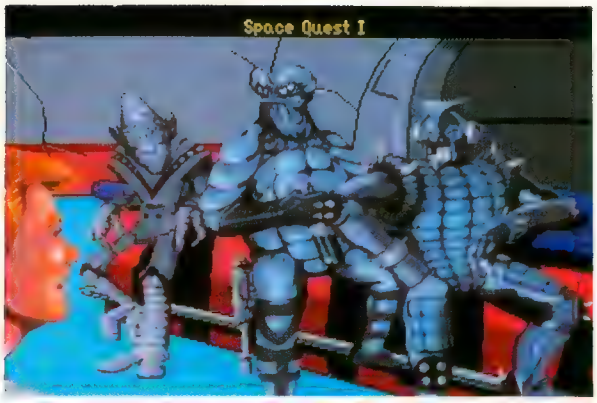
SPACE QUEST IV

Roger Wilco and the Time Rippers

by Theo Clarke



Designed by
Mark Crowe and Scott Murphy

Published by
Sierra On-line

Price £39.99

Available for PC (VGA and MCGA), PC (EGA), ST and Amiga

PC version requires hard disk, 640K, 286 chip or better

Roland, AdLib, SoundBlaster, PS/1 and Game Blaster sound supported

It is five years since I first met Roger Wilco. At the time he was an apprentice sanitation engineer although the press were soon to dub him a 'space janitor'. He was working aboard the spacelab Arcada where scientists had just developed a Star Generator, intended to turn dead planets into suns. Unfortunately, a militant group of Space Pirates, long banished from Wilco's home planet of Xenon, board Arcada with the intention of stealing the Star Generator. Roger was asleep in a broom closet at the time and although he has since greatly exaggerated the story, it is true that he managed to get aboard the Sarien space cruiser and set the Star Generator to self destruct.

All of this has been documented by two guys from Andromeda and has been marketed by the Earthlings at Sierra On-line as **Space Quest I: The Sarien Encounter.**

This first game took up less than 720K of disk space and although the graphics were of the same low resolution as the first **Leisure Suit Larry** and **King's Quest** games, the ability to walk characters behind the scenery made this an impressive early three-dimensional adventure.

Volhaul, captain of the Sariens, was not thrilled by the thwarting of his plan. He decided to give the two guys from Andromeda the opportunity to sell a sequel by flooding the universe with genetically engineered insurance salesmen. He captured Roger to stop him foiling the plot but the intrepid hero escaped through sheer fluke and messed it up anyway. This time Roger and his environment were looking much smoother, but the two guys from Andromeda needed nearly a megabyte to fit it all in.

The success of **Space Quest II** was of such magnitude that one of Sierra's competitors (Can I mention Scumsoft's name, Ed, or will their lawyers get us? *Go ahead. If you want to spend the rest of your life working for nothing – Ed*) hired the software pirates of Pestulon to kidnap the two authors. Fortunately the two guys managed to get a message to Roger and he was able to rescue them. These adventures were chronicled in **Space Quest III** which took almost two megabytes of disk space and required twice as much memory as the previous episode.

Times Are A Changing

Things were getting big. We may have thought that **Pirates of Pestulon** is big but that's peanuts compared to **Space Quest IV**. The package containing six 1.44Mb diskettes weighed over a pound and the game is so large that Sierra has supplied an option to run the game from a combination of hard and floppy disks. It is perhaps inevitable that this option is not worth choosing: if there is not enough space on the hard disk, make extra space by deleting files because the game files are so big that they take an age to load.

Roger Wilco And The Time Rippers uses the SCI game engine upon which Sierra has based all of its recent games. The graphics are quite superb. This is a grubby vision of the future in 256 colours. The long opening sequence is an entertaining animated sequence that introduces us to Space Quest XII: Volhaul's Revenge II. Roger is transported back to Xenon where the series began but he is being chased by the Sequel Police who have come from the future with an end in mind. The end of Roger and the Space Quest series, that is. Fortunately Roger can call upon the assistance of the rebel Time Rippers and the amazonian Latex Babes of Estros.

Using a stolen time machine Roger is able to move in and out of a number of the Space Quest episodes. Some of these have not yet been published; the Latex Babes come from Space Quest XVI. The graphics quality of the future sequels does not seem to be any better than those of **Space Quest IV** so we may be able to deduce that IBM's XGA standard never catches on. The earlier episodes, such as **Space Quest II**, use the same graphics quality that they had when they were released, so we can see the quality degrade as we go back to Pestulon!

The most obvious difference between this fourth, and supposedly last, game in the series and its predecessors is the volume of text on the screens. Gone are the terse one-liners. Characters discourse at length at the slightest provocation. I am told that Sierra is already auditioning voices to speak these parts on the CD-ROM version that will be out later in the year. Given that the game already runs to nearly 10Mb it would not be practical to put digital speech on diskettes (at just 45 seconds of speech per diskette) but CD-ROM will support the entire game on a single disk. The music is already impressive for owners of a Roland sound card or equivalent, but PC speakers are not noted for high fidelity. Later models of CD-ROM can be used to generate digital sound directly from the disk drive.

High quality games of this sort are not cheap but this science fiction spoof is both funny and challenging. Most of the puzzles are fair, even if it does take a while to guess things like the co-ordinates for Pestulon or Estros. There are many hours of entertainment to be had from the Time Ripping adventures.

Modem owners can call Sierra's own bulletin board and hints line in the UK on 0734 304004 (8-N-1 up to 2400) if they get really stuck. SP

DEATH KNIGHTS OF KRYNN

The Return Of Lord Soth

by Jamie Thomson

DEATH KNIGHTS of **Krynn** is the second in the Dragonlance **AD&D** computer role-playing series, the first being **Champions of Krynn**. It's a direct follow on in terms of plot and in terms of the levels that players can attain – going right up to 14th. (This will mean something to those familiar with **D&D** – to everyone else, it just means you meet more and tougher monsters, and you can throw more stuff at them too. A lot more).

Installation to hard disk was easy with – incredibly – only one disk provided. It was also very quick. You can also transfer characters from **Champions of Krynn**. Unlike previous games in Dragonlance and the Forgotten Realms the method for doing this is at last clearly explained!

More Of The Same

The game system is the same as in the game's predecessor, and in SSI's Forgotten Realms series. It is an excellent rendition of **Advanced Dungeons & Dragons** to a computer format, using a menu system – both in terms of the rule system and in making it as user friendly as an unwieldy game like **D&D** could be on a computer. The player gets to assemble a party from a choice of most **D&D** character classes – Cleric, Magic-user (with subclasses of red and white mages, determined by alignment), Thief, Paladin, Fighter, Ranger, and Knights (of the Crown, Rose and so on, depending on your accomplishments).

It is possible to have up to six characters in the party with two slots for non-player character hirelings. Selecting a character brings up a menu to find out his stats (strength, dexterity and so on), the items owned, money (in gold or platinum pieces) including his status (not rank in society, but overall physical condition ranging from OK to dead). Druid spells are available for high-level rangers.

Death Knights deals with very high level combat, mighty spells, mighty warriors and deadly warriors. Combats follow the on-screen tactical battlemap mode of computer role-playing games, with characters and monsters moving and acting in turn, based on dexterity. The map is divided into squares (but not marked on the map) for movement and combat with a character or monster icon filling one square. When a character's turn comes up, their actions can be chosen from a number of commands: move, attack, cast spell, use item and other.

Iconoclasm

Graphics are all right, but nothing special. Character icons can be modified quite comprehensively, including what weapons carried, clothes, colours, and even whether he (or she, for dwarves) has a beard. Movement in the underworld or a city is via a 3-D view in a section of the screen, showing walls, doors, arches and other dungeon paraphernalia. Not bad graphically, with varying 'wall-types' according to which 'dungeon' the party is in. Those familiar with **AD&D** will have no trouble getting into the game – others will have to read a well-written rule book that explains things clearly. Unfortunately, it *is* **AD&D**, so be ready for some of the illogical vagaries of the game.

Death Knights is too similar to previous games in the **AD&D** series and unfortunately my interest soon waned. Nothing seems to have changed save the plot. There are no great innovations in the game and I was left with the feeling that I was playing a game I'd already played but with the encounters and plot developments randomised into another order.

NAME
AC HP
LORD SOTH TURNS TO YOU BEFORE MOUNTING
HIS NIGHTMARE. 'WITH WHAT I SHALL
GATHERED TODAY, I SHALL RAISE MY
INVINCIBLE ARMY. TREASURE YOUR PATHETIC
VICTORY, IT WILL NOT BE LONG LIVED.'

Back From The Dead

Even the plot didn't feel particularly original. Having defeated the enemy in the previous game you are invited back to the Gargath Outpost where a certain Sir Karl was slain (players of **Champions** will remember him as the lover of a certain white dragon – kinky or what!). When you arrive there so does old Sir Karl – as a hideous Death Knight riding an undead dragon. Soon the whole outpost is surrounded by resurgent evil forces and you are besieged. And so it develops into the standard quest.

There is only so much of a game type that you can take. **Eye of the Beholder** represents an innovation in computer **D&D** but **Death Knights of Krynn** is flogging the same game system to death, even if the system is a good one. As a series, these **AD&D** games represent good value for money in terms of hours played, but this game is by no means exceptional. SP

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Designed by
Westwood Associates

Published by
SSI/US Gold

Price £29.99

Available for the PC and Amiga
Reviewed on the PC

CGA, EGA

EYE OF THE BEHOLDER

Splot Not Plot

by Ian Marsh

ANYONE who wants to play **Advanced Dungeons and Dragons** on a computer will find it hard to fault SSI's **Eye Of The Beholder**: it is an accurate portrayal of a long-established role-playing game. For a computer game it offers role-playing in the sense that it does all its pencil and paper equivalent does to encourage the activity; it is typically **AD&D** because once all the effort has gone into developing the plot and atmosphere, the characters enter and are sealed in a dungeon, in this case the sewers beneath the city of Waterdeep.

Once Piergeiron, the chief lord of Waterdeep, has got them into this mess, there are only two ways out: discover and defeat the source of non-specific evil that terrorizes the city of Waterdeep or just die in the attempt.

Rather than subject ing new players to the rigmarole of creating characters, **Eye of the Beholder** thoughtfully provides a party of four adventurers for instant use. It is a nice touch that allows the player to get used to the game mechanics before taking his own group into the sewers. It is more fun, however, to create a party of adventurers. Although it goes without saying that a balance of fighting and magical skills is needed, the rule book repeats this information many times. Nice touches to character generation include the ability to pick a face to go with each adventurer's stats. These are attractive in VGA, passable but brash in EGA, and downright horrible in CGA. On the basic adventuring screen, it is this face that provides the fastest way of identifying each character. The display shows the four player-controlled characters, up to two non-player characters, the characters' view of their surroundings – dungeon corridors and rooms in 3-D – movement arrows, a compass and a dialogue box.

A mouse makes the game really easy to play. Click on a character's face and the display of items in hand and current health explodes into a large equipment-managing screen for that character. Characters do not start out with much in the way of equipment, but as the adventure progresses, they find armour, food, scrolls, better weapons and objects such as keys. The left mouse button allows objects to be selected and moved about between a character's backpack, belt pouch, hands and so on; paging arrows make it easy to switch single objects between characters in the party. It is a system that doesn't take long to get used to, and all in all it's a quick, efficient means of taking and using objects. What would be handy, however, is a rubber-banding option, such as the one used by GEM, to group objects for speedy transfer between characters or between characters and the dungeon.

Flipping the page reveals a character's statistics in terms of the **AD&D** game. As these will have been heavily manipulated at the character generation stage, however, the only important things are hit points and armour class. It's probably the least-used screen in an adventure, although at least it shows when a character has discovered a magic ring that improves armour class. At the character generation stage it is possible to change attributes to reflect those of a favourite character, but as that character starts at level three, it's an option best forgotten, especially because unique equipment cannot be input. It allows characters but not characterisation to be brought into play.

Spellbooks and holy symbols can be clicked on to reveal lists of spells that have been memorised or prayed for by magic users and clerics respectively. One tip is to immediately pray for and memorise spells before advancing far into the sewer system: spell-using classes do not start with any spells ready for immediate use.

Down in the dungeon, getting around the first three levels is fairly easy, because maps of the sewers are provided. There are differences, however, and disorienting traps that teach a player to keep a close eye on the compass. Down on level two, however, there is a pointless semi-maze which seemingly teleports the party about identical corridors. There really is no point to including sections like this in a computer game: they are just infuriating and don't add to the entertainment value – rather they detract from it. Mildly disorienting traps are about the limit of any player's patience on a computer game.

In the rooms and sewers of the underworld lurk a host of regular **AD&D** monsters, from kobolds to giant spiders. Each is animated to a limited degree, but at least characters get a clear idea of what they are fighting. Only the leading two characters of the party can fight, so there's no spreading out to make use of space, and therefore no opportunity for the tactics that arise in a role-playing game. But arm the second rank of characters with missile weapons or spells, and the tactical limitation of the system is almost irrelevant because all of the party can take part. Striking with a weapon is achieved by clicking the right button of the mouse while the cursor is over the character's weapon hand; the weapon is grey over after striking until it is again ready for use.

Eye of the Beholder will inevitably be compared with **Dungeonmaster,** and apart from the layout of the screen, many elements are similar. Yet the **AD&D** game has the advantage for anyone familiar with the system that they will quickly be able to pick up and understand how the game works without the need to remember what magical symbols mean. It's the most fun I've had playing **AD&D** for a very long time. SP

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Westwood Associates

Published by
SSI/US Gold

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Reviewed on the PC

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ZORK II

A Text Book Case

by John Scott

HERE COMES number six in the series of budget rerelease goodies from Infocom! In this sequel to the original **Zork** adventure the exploration of the Great Underground Empire continues and the danger increases as the brave adventurer copes with unicorns and dragons, attempts to rescue a beautiful but dishevelled princess, and avoids the ever present Grues. While wandering around inside a (hopefully) extinct volcano there are all kinds of wonderful discoveries just waiting to be... well...discovered.

Ancient Devices

This section of the ruined empire includes many relects of bygone days such as the famed Bank of Zork and many even stranger areas. Various ancient devices are scattered around and are still operative. Some are exceedingly useful, others are equally deadly. But by far the biggest problem, the biggest darned pain in the neck of all, is the Wizard of Frobozz.

The Wiz was exiled here in days gone by, and has since gone totally loopy. His powers have diminished over the years, but he still has enough tricks up his sleeve to give unwelcome intruders all kinds of problems. His usual modus operandi is to sneak up and wave his wand while shouting words which begin with the letter 'F'. This isn't quite as pervy as it sounds – the words are usually things like Float, Fierce, Fumble, Fantasize, Fall, and so on.

Quite often these spells (for such they are) are just a minor inconvenience (such as when the adventurer is temporarily too weak to carry vital implements after being hit by the Feeble spell), but, on the other hand, when one is high above the ground in a hot air balloon, the Fall spell has lethal consequences! Sometimes the Wiz is let down by his magic, and he has to retire, blushing, with smoke pouring from the sleeves of his robe. Perhaps the best way to defeat him would be to find the secret of his magic and fight fire with fire?

Zork II will certainly appeal to everyone who enjoyed the original **Zork** adventure. It has all the attractions of its illustrious predecessor, and the aim to get the better of the Wizard of Frobozz almost provides the element of storyline which was absent in the original adventure. I enjoyed **Zork II**, just as I've enjoyed all of the Infocom adventures I've tried so far, though I couldn't honestly say that it was a favourite. This is because I prefer adventures with a very strong storyline (such as **Wishbringer, Leather Goddesses, Hitch-Hiker's Guide**) so I suppose it's just a matter of taste, really.

In any case, I reckon that my least favourite Infocom adventure could still provide some useful lessons to today's adventure writers. These pure text games are little gems. Every time I play them I'm reminded of just what is most important in a computer adventure. Not the animation or graphics – these have none. Not the brilliant sound FX – there's none of that either. No, where Infocom games score is in their ability to make you suspend disbelief and become utterly absorbed in the atmosphere of the game.

I think that **Zork II** is harder than **Zork**, but maybe I'm just getting a bit thick in my old age. It's a pity that the games don't include a 'Help' command. Infocom used to produce a series of hint books – I think they were called 'Invisi-clues'. The idea was that the increasingly explicit hints were invisible until treated by the magic felt-tip pen provided with the book. I don't know if these are still available. If not, perhaps Mastertronic should give serious thought to acquiring the rights and re-releasing them. Anyway, there you go. **Zork II**. If you call yourself an adventurer you'll have to have it in your collection. SP

Designed by
Marc Blank and David Lebling

Published by
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Reviewed on the Amiga

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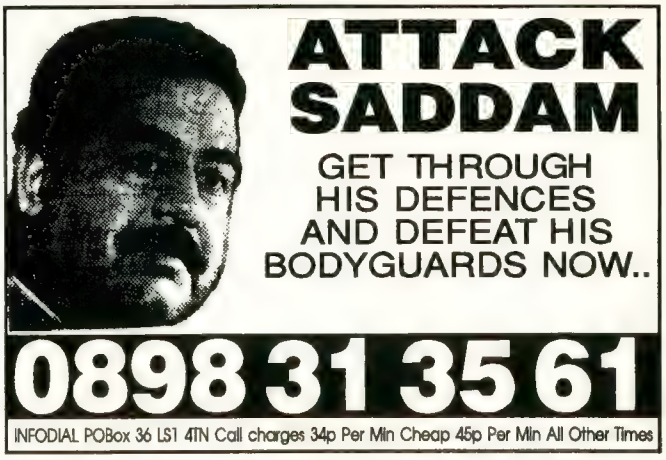
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MEGA TRAVELLER 1

The Zhodani Conspiracy

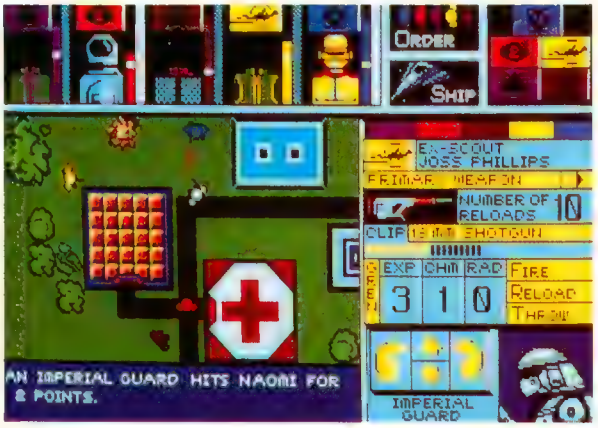
by Stuart Mitchell

MEGATRAVELLER 1: **The Zhodani Conspiracy** is the first in a projected series of computer games adapted from the popular **MegaTraveller** pencil and paper role-playing system. In many ways the game is slavishly faithful to its parent. Unfortunately, there are some key differences which seriously mar the computer adaptation.

To begin the game, five characters must be created for the party of Travellers. A pre-rolled party is provided, but as is the case with most role-playing games, customised characters provide greater satisfaction. The character generation system is a very accurate rendition of the **MegaTraveller** system: roll basic attributes, then select a career for the character. This career will dictate the kinds of skills and equipment (and salary) that characters will acquire during their service. The career options range from Merchant to Scout. Generally characters who have embarked on a variety of careers are more desirable in that they will have available a wide array of skills.

In the latest version of **MegaTraveller 1**, character attributes can be printed out, thus the computer game can act as a handy character generation program for those playing the paper and pencil game. Unlike many newer computer games, however, **MegaTraveller 1** does not display portraits of characters. Nor does it allow the player to paint one. This is a nit, but it would have been nice to have something more to distinguish different party members than the colour of their slot. Once a party has been created the game commences in a bar. This is a computer controlled sequence in which a meeting takes place with an agent for the Imperium. She advises of a Zhodani plot to foment widespread rebellion on Imperium planets to aid an imminent Zhodani attack. Before she can tell more, Zhodani agents rush in forcing player characters to make a break for it while the Imperium agent covers for them. She urges that her vital information be passed on to another agent on a nearby planet. Once this sequence is completed, the party is placed outside the bar in combat with Zhodani agents.

At this point, the player is firmly in control. The game display uses an overhead view with player characters either collected into a single square, or split up one member per square. Combat in the original version of computer **MegaTraveller** was strictly real-time: as you moved and fired with your characters, the enemy characters were moving and firing. Since the player had to control five separate characters, it was easy to lose one or more characters in the confusion. Fortunately, in the latest version this system has been modified. Now players may pause the action, issue orders to each character, then unpause the game. Once the game is unpaused, action proceeds in real-time, but pause can be re-invoked at any time.



What's In A Phase?

This change has greatly improved the combat system, but I still found it cumbersome. The original **MegaTraveller** used a phase-based combat system. Phases alternated between the player and the enemy, and there was no real-time element in the system. Even with liberal use of pauses, this latest combat system has a vaguely arcade feel to it. This is a matter of personal taste, and many players will enjoy the difference. One nice aspect to the new system is that combat has more of a miniatures feel with players manoeuvring around obstacles and other characters.

Another disappointment lies in the graphic presentation in the game. **MegaTraveller 1** uses a strictly overhead view rather than a first person perspective (as in **Buck Rogers**) or a 3-D overhead view (as in **Ultima VI**). I had to think a bit to realise that the coloured circles with two handles were actually a view of my characters' helmet and shoulders. And of course, the animation of these shapes is not particularly evocative, most closely resembling Lego Land people moving about. The colour scheme supports CGA, EGA, or VGA, but there is little difference between the EGA and VGA graphics.

In addition to mucking about on the surface, players will travel between star systems and between the planets in a star system. The method of travel involves another arcade sequence. As your ship approaches a planet, you must carefully use thrust and directional keys to guide your ship close to the planet while slowing to nearly a standstill. The game enforces standard Newtonian physics, so this sequence can be quite frustrating as you zip just past your objective. Speed and direction quickly compound and it can be quite arduous to correct an error. The entire sequence is reminiscent of the old arcade game **Space Wars** and again is not a part of the original **MegaTraveller** game. Travel in space also requires a computer and software. The computer has a limited amount of memory. The software must be loaded into it and, if necessary, swapped for other software. This isn't exasperating except that the load time for software is slow and no 'hot key' is present to allow you to simply skip the animated load sequence. In fact, this super-advanced high-tech computer loads software slower than my old XT!

As mentioned earlier, the plot of the game involves a quest. The ultimate goal is to help foil the Zhodani conspiracy. The first goal is to carry word of this conspiracy to another Imperium agent in a nearby star system. To do this, it is necessary to outfit the ship with a space drive capable of carrying the party to their star system.

Designed by
Jane Yeager and Christopher Straka

Published by
Empire Simulations

Price £34.99

Available on PC

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Digitized sounds through PC speaker

Review based on version 3.0

Your First Impression

BREACH 2

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- "A thoroughly absorbing close combat simulation" (ACE); "hugely enjoyable" (ST Format); "a superb product...it's just so addictive!" (Your Amiga)
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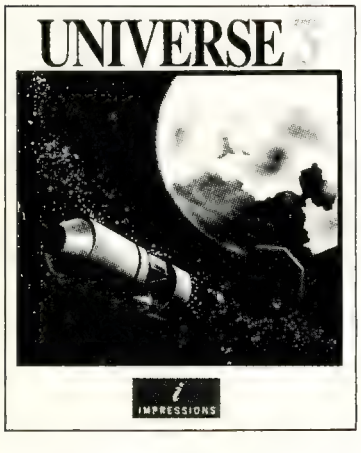

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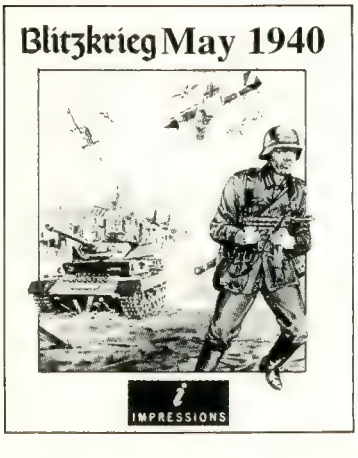

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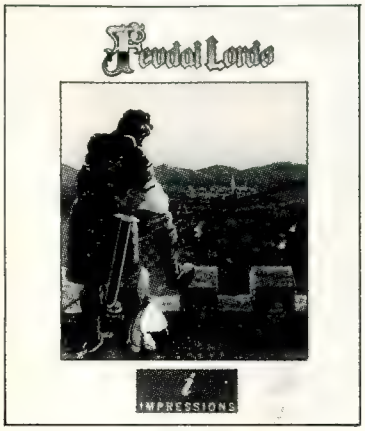

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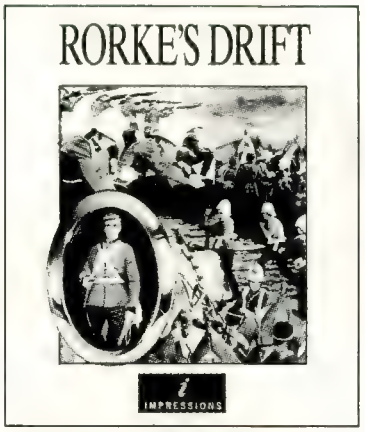

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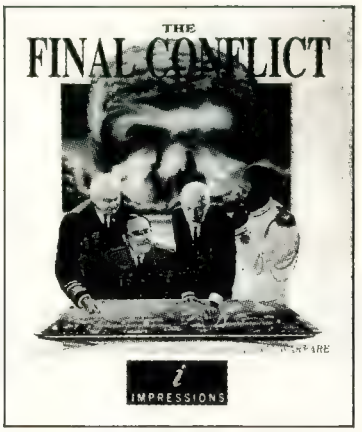

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G S O O N

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desert campaign in WW2
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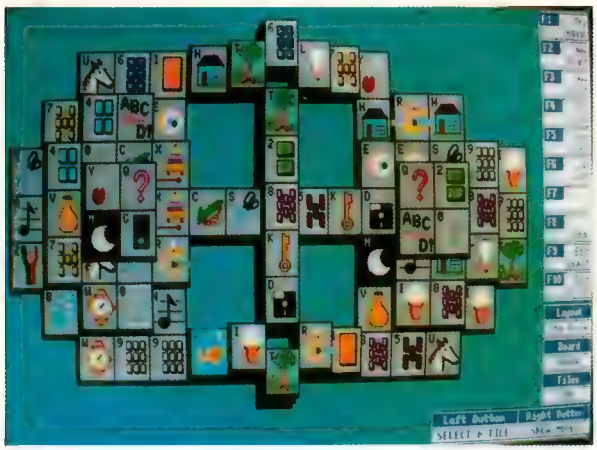
W I T H S T Y L E

FAIR SHARES

Marcus Rowland takes a view in the Public Domain and Shareware market



Above, top: Taipei 3.
Above, bottom: Solitile

TAIPEI 3
Designed by David Norvis
Windows 3 game
Registration $10 to: David Norvis, 17911 NE 101st CT, Redmond, WA98052, USA

CHECKERS
Designed by Gregory Thatcher
Windows 3 game

One of the things computers are quite good at is acting as the referee, and sometimes as the opponent, for abstract games. For example, Reversi (also known as **Othello**) was never particularly popular as a 'real' board game; each move involved turning over a large number of counters, and it was easy to make mistakes. All computer versions do this job for the player, and speed the game immensely. In the last couple of years the use of mice, high-resolution graphics and fast processors have improved these board games even more. Now Windows has given developers an environment that bypasses much of the need to think about catering for all the different IBM graphics standards, at the cost of a little speed that isn't really too important in a board game. Windows comes with a couple of games, one of them Reversi, but plenty more are available as shareware and public domain software. Unfortunately Windows 3 needs a hard disk and 386 processor for the best results. Fortunately PCs that can't cope with Windows can still use plenty of stand-alone programs, and most have much more modest system requirements.

Most of the boardgames I've seen originate in America, and registration of all those discussed is $10. The snag is that it probably costs $10 to convert a cheque drawn on a British bank into dollars. Sending a cheque for the sterling equivalent, or written as $10 on a UK account, will cause the programmer endless problems. Unless you're lucky enough to know someone with an American bank account, it's best to add something to cover bank charges, or to send an international money order or a well-disguised $10 bill.

TAIPEI 3

This is a classic solitaire tile matching game, which has appeared under many other names. The rules are ridiculously simple; a computer-randomised pyramid of 144 Mah-Jong tiles is shown, with only the top layer of tiles visible. Tiles can only be removed in pairs, and only if they are uncovered and have one unobstructed side. Naturally, the idea is to get rid of all the tiles. At first it's easy to find pairs, but bad selections may leave you with a block, where only one tile of each pair is accessible.

This version offers help and various cheats: 'peek' lets you see all the tiles in a stack, 'match' finds a pair of tiles that can be removed (but not necessarily the best pair). Each game is identified by a number, the random seed used to generate the board, and an option lets you use this number to recreate an old game. Since the computer is acting as board and referee, not as another player, there are no skill levels. All that can really be said about the program's competance is that it seems to avoid dealing completely unplayable arrangements, which is all that's really needed in a solitaire game. There are earlier versions for Windows 1 and 2.

CHECKERS

This is a solo draughts game for Windows 3. It supports huffing, queens, and other competition rules, and has five levels of play. The graphics are minimal, just coloured disks for the pieces, but are quite adequate. Calculation time is a few seconds per move on the lowest level, rising with skill level. I can't really say how well it plays; it always beats me at 'beginner' level, but I'm a lousy draughts player. The game is marked as freeware, not shareware, and there doesn't seem to be any registration fee.

SOLITILE

This is another Taipei variant, this time a stand-alone program running on EGA and VGA systems only. It's mouse controlled, although fairly clumsy keyboard alternatives are supported. It offers nine board layouts, from the traditional pyramid to 'Starship', tiles stacked in the shape of the USS Enterprise. Unlike more traditional versions, this variant uses Westernised tiles identified by letters or numbers and a picture (such as C for Car), and has an option to edit the layout. Games can be saved. I've heard that you can obtain alternate tiles and a tile pattern editing program, but this wasn't supplied with the version reviewed here. These features make it one of the most versatile Taipei variants, and a worthwhile addition to any software collection.

There's one annoying bug, which may just be a corrupt graphics file in the copy I received; the 'R' piece has a peculiar 'notch', which is visible even when it's the third or fourth tile down, giving one tiny hint to the location of pieces. Like **Taipei 3,** this

program seems to have a routine to stop it dealing unplayable arrangements, but is otherwise acting only as board and referee.

QUINTA

In this program players take turns to place counters and stop their opponent putting five in a row. It supports one or two players, and runs on EGA or VGA. A mouse is essential, but for some reason the icons and 'counters' feel a little small and fiddly. It tries to play a fairly mean game, but unfortunately it only took me a couple of hours to find a fatal flaw; there's a simple winning strategy that nearly always beats the computer, but wouldn't fool a human opponent for a second. After discovering it I lost interest. There may be an update that corrects this problem, but I can't honestly say that I care enough to bother registering my copy. You may disagree, if so send $10 to Les Penner, 25 Shadow Lane, Great Neck, NY11021, USA SP

Megatraveller, continued

This item costs two million Credits. So the first part of the game (in fact, the majority of the game) will be spent figuring out ways to earn that sum. The central strength and weakness of **MegaTraveller** lies in this loose plot-line. Players can choose to follow a trading strategy to earn money. Alternatively, they can turn to space piracy or bounty hunting. There are also a number of short mini-quests which they can discover and solve. This free-form structure will be heaven for many players tired of being strait-jacketed into a plot-line. However, this lack of structure will be disconcerting to those who, like me, like to pursue goals and sub-goals that clearly lead to the solution of the overall game. Preferences here will vary from player to player, so my advice is simply to evaluate the kind of game you like and determine whether the free- wheeling style of **MegaTraveller** is for you. SP

NEXT ISSUE

Heart of the Dragon

The Killing Cloud

SOLITILE
Designed by Everett Kaser
Registration $10, $15 for an upgrade, $35 for source code to Everett Kaser, Solitile, 35405 Spruce St., Albany OR97321, USA

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FLOOR 13

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OMNIPLAY HORSE RACING

Jockey Competition and Track Designer Modules

by Brian Walker

ALTHOUGH relatively unknown in this country, Ed Ringler is one of the top American sports games designers. His reputation is based largely on **Omni Play Horse Racing** and to a lesser extent **Omni Play Basketball**. When the former was first released several modules were promised 'soon'. Unfortunately the company ran into some difficulty, putting a hold on further product. Happily the troubles appear to have been resolved and the company is now on the verge of signing a deal with a major US label.

Turf's Up

Before looking at these two new modules a brief recap of the original game is in order, if only to correct some of the poor reviews the game received upon at the hands of the comics when it was first released. **Omni Play Horse Racing** is a 1-4 player modular game that seeks to cover every aspect of the 'Sport of Kings'. The basic game comes with the Handicappers Module. As the name suggests this puts the player in the role of a punter. As with all the modules the victory conditions can be user defined. The basic objective in this module is quite simple: most cash at the end of a meet clinches it. Bets are placed according to the information available. A quick scroll through the screens will reveal everything you wished to know about a horse but were afraid to ask. Similarly, jockey histories are comprehensive – everything from past form to current 'mood' is assessed. The race graphics are adequate: 'real' horses on the straight, numbered blobs on the corners.

Two more modules quickly followed: the Track 2 support disk, and the Stable Owners Module. The support disk also contained 128 new horses which offered a nice change. The Stable Owners Module, though, is in a different class altogether. This puts the player in charge of a bunch of nags who are entered in races at the owners' discretion. The victory conditions in this are nicely varied. Options include racing in a cup knock out competition with the aim of reaching the final of the SportTime trophy, or racing for winnings over a user defined number of meets. When setting up the stable players can study the horses form so selection is not purely guesswork. As the races progress each horse's speed must be checked as they age, just as the form of young fillies should be monitored to see if they are ready for the races offering rich pickings to the victor. Fatigue also plays an important role when determining which horse to enter when. Gradually a fondness develops for certain gee gees as their idiosyncrasies become clear. This, and the amount of decision making that the player has to make, ensures that this a module a real winner.

A Taxing Affair

And so on to the Jockey competition. Before running this it must be installed onto the system disk. As it is not currently listed you may be wondering exactly where it sits. Simple: it overwrites the Fantasy Stables, just as the Track Design overwrites Fantasy Betting. Both modules update the system disk to version 1.1 while the Jockey competition updates previous tracks to 1.1. The first major difference perceived between this and previous modules is that it is solitaire, and, shock horror, it contains an arcade option! As the manual describes the simulation mode as being for 'the serious gamer' it is on this we shall concentrate. As ever, the victory conditions are user defined. In this case the options are: first to a money level, first to a point level, or highest point or money level after a predetermined number of races. As the player is competing against fifteen computer jockeys there is naturally a bit of a scramble for rides before each race. Two methods of selecting a mount are available: random or rotating. The random setting adds uncertainty and excitement. As the nags take their places at the starting gate it becomes apparent how improved the graphics are in this new version. The colours are rich and the sound thunderous as the hooves clatter around the course. Despite this the competition did not grab me in the same way as the Handicappers module. Because of the somewhat chancy nature of selecting a mount there is not, ironically, the hands-on 'feel' that the Stable Owners Module provides.

Brand National

Probably the biggest growth area in add ons has been 'builder' programs. SSG started it all with their Warpaint program which allowed customisation of terrain amongst other things. In sporting games the most notable such program has been the course builder which came with **Jack Nicklaus Unlimited Golf**. Its appeal in that context was obvious: most golfers have their favourite course, plus their own fantasy course. The program permitted a silicon dream to come true. The appeal of the Track Designer for **Horse Racing** is less immediately obvious. Do punters really have their favourite track? If not, how much variation in game play does the program provide? I suspect the answer to both these questions is no, and not a lot, respectively. Having said that, it does the job as you would expect. The range of objects and utilities is less than in the aforementioned course builder, which is the only point of comparison. But then you can put almost anything on a golf course. One of the advantages of the

Continued on Page 44

Designed by
Ed Ringler

Published by
SporTime

Available for the
Amiga only

Price $14.99

Only available by
mail order from:
SporTime Division –
Dept 500, 3941-E
South Bristol St, Suite
#551, Santa Ana, CA
92704, USA. Tel 0101
714 966 0207 Fax
0101 714 966 1972

PRO TENNIS TOUR 2

Love Game

by Brian Walker

SO THERE you are on court for the first time. All kitted out in your Andre Agassi Day-Glo gear and post hippie headband. Slowly you crane back, readying yourself for the McEnroe style pre serve flourish. Over comes the racket and...*whoosh*. Whoosh? Shouldn't that have been *thwack*? Yes, it should. But 'whoosh' is the sound a racket makes when it connects with the mass known as O_2. If the aim of **Pro Tennis Tour 2** is to simulate such embarrassing moments, then it succeeds admirably. Tennis is one of *the* most difficult sports to play, and it is only right that this new, German designed, simulation from French publishers UbiSoft should reflect that difficulty. Luckily for novices there is not only a practice mode (or 'junior' as it is referred to in the game), but a programmable ball machine as well.

In junior mode the players do not have to concern themselves with the intricacies of service or the exertions of movement. The only worry here is getting the ball back across the net. This is a good place to start getting used to hitting the ball while at the same time the competitive matches against computer opponents are fun to play.

What lifts the game out of the arcades and into the rarefied world of championship tennis is the 'character' mode. With this option the strength of players' strokes and agility of movement are dependent upon pre determined characteristics. These in turn are defined by the allocation of 80 points which players have at their disposal. If a heavy serve and volley game is required the points are allocated to service and forehand volley. Apart from specific strokes, points may also be added to improve stamina. This is an important area as fitness determines speed around the court. Once these parameters have been set they may never be changed for that particular player. The only way characteristics may be improved is through play itself.

Grand Slam

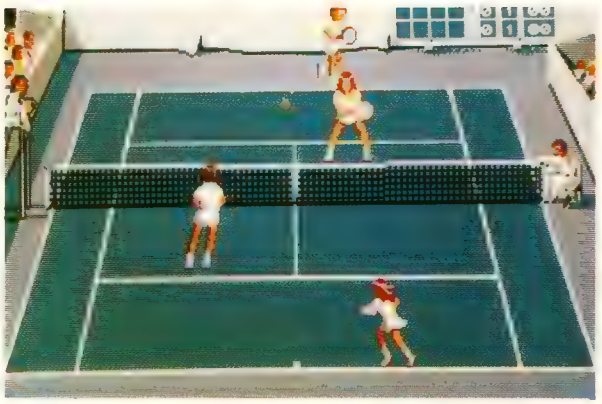
As far as competition goes, the 'tournament' mode provides the optimum challenge. Here, players may compete for the grand slam as well as participating in the Davis Cup. Before each match a guide to the opponent's strengths and weaknesses is provided, as well as their ranking. Real names are not used, though may be created with the edit facility provided. At the end of a match the information menu will provide player stats: how many successful forehands, smashes, and so on were made during play. These are useful in locating weak points but are only provided, sensibly enough, when the match is played in character mode although tournaments can be played even in junior mode. As one would expect, both player characters and tournaments may be saved to disk, but only from the main menu.

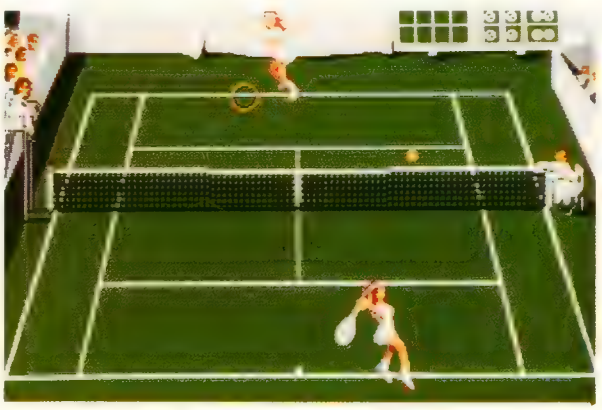
Balls And Whistles

In play, **Pro Tennis 2** offers a reasonable simulation of the genuine article, though there is still room for improvement. Movement is very realistic as are the strokes themselves. Lobs, smashes, and drop shots are all possible using the right combination of joystick position and fire button depression. The fault and net calls occur with just about the right frequency. As mentioned earlier the game is difficult, but not impossible, to master.

The graphics throughout the game are excellent, given that there is only so much you can do with a tennis court. As befits its continental origins, the documentation sits somewhere between the awfulness of most UK manuals and the excellence of the US software houses. In its favour it appears to be complete. There is even a tips section, though this could easily have been extended without giving too much away.

Improvements: I would like to see the depiction of some of the more famous courts; for example the appearance of the Roland Garros in Paris, Forest Hills in New York, and of course Wimbledon, would add a great deal of flavour to the game. As it is the courts provided look like something donated by a rate capped council. The scoreboard too is totally bereft of style and clarity. A better idea would be to have this accessed by a 'hot' key on a separate screen.





Some crowd scenes would not go amiss either. The lack of a middle class voice intoning the score is something of a mystery also, especially as fault and net calls are audible.

The absence of some of these items is, I suspect, due to memory. Indeed the 'mixed' option and extended sound effects can only be accessed on an Amiga 3000 with its 1 meg of ChipRam. The good news is that **Pro Tennis Tour 2** will be available (eventually) for CD-TV. This version should contain all the bells and whistles. In the meantime: anyone for **Pro Tennis 3**? SP

Designed by
Blue Byte

Published by
UbiSoft

Price £24.99

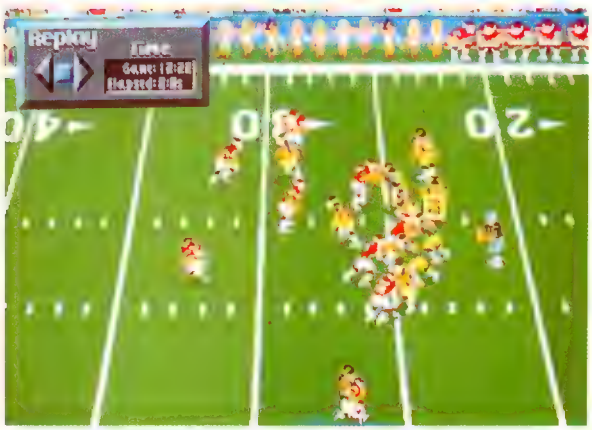
Available for the Amiga

ST and PC versions to follow

JOE MONTANA FOOTBALL

Candlestick Spark

by Brian Walker



Designed by
Mike Benna and Jeff Sember

Published by
Sega

Price £34.99 (import)

Available for the PC

VGA, EGA, CGA, Hercules

AdLib and Roland MT-32 soundboards supported

Keyboard and joystick interface

1-2 players

THE QUARTERBACK is the most revered position in American football, as the living legend that is Joe Montana clearly demonstrates. Unlike their European counterparts (especially one whose surname begins with the letter 'G'), American sportsmen are not in the habit of lending their name to naff games. Jack Nicklaus, John Madden, Earl Weaver, all have games bearing their name that do justice to their status. Attempting to emulate this feat is Joe Montana and **Joe Montana Football**.

Clone League

The digitised front end of the game bodes well, capturing, as it does, the razzmatazz that is the essence of American Football. The menu screens quickly reveal that this is a hybrid stats/action game in the manner of **TV Sports Football** but with the addition of a sophisticated playmaking facility. The action takes place in an NFL clone league. Except for the eponymous star all player names are fictitious, though they can be edited. Players are rated on a 2-9 scale for age, speed, strength, and skill. These too can be edited, but in the interests of play balance I'd recommend that they be left as they are.

The usual stats for sacks, interceptions, and the like are also provided and accumulate as the season progresses. Before going on to league play there are all the practice options that one has now come to expect in American sports games. The player roster screens are worth a special mention. These are exceptionally well implemented with a digitised picture of the selected player popping up together with his stats. Indeed the presentation of all the menu screen is flawless.

The league consists of six divisions comprising a total of 28 teams. The structure of a season approximates that of the NFL with wild card playoffs in week 17, divisional playoffs in week 18, and then 'Super Sunday'. Leagues may be saved to disk and resumed at the player's discretion. There is no limit to the number of teams a player may manage. Teams may also be 'sold', though cash plays no part in the game. Unowned teams are computer controlled come match day. Before going to the stadium players so inclined may wish to consult the playbook menu. The playbook contains 24 offensive plays and 12 defensive plays each of which are neatly illustrated on screen. All of these may be edited and customised to the nth degree. Or, if preferred, brand new playbooks may be created and saved to disk. The plays themselves are easy to call and to recognise, thanks to the illustration showing the numbers of the primary and secondary receivers for that play.

Action Call

The field of action is displayed from a side-on viewpoint. This works fine thanks to the yardage markers used in the gridiron game. The players themselves are reasonably easy to distinguish mainly because of the colourful kits (these too can be edited if thought to be too garish). Graphically the game favours primary colours and while this makes for interesting viewing, the comparatively poor resolution makes the success of such an approach less than total. The play calls and scrimmages are well handled through either joystick or keyboard controls – joystick skills are not a prerequisite for victory. The essence here is, like in the real game, making the most of the strengths of one's own team, and exploiting the weaknesses of opponents. Scouting reports provide details of what to expect from the opposition. A useful facility for rookies is the variable game speed option. Even on a 'slow' setting play really moves along. As the game obviously runs in real time, beginners can face punishing time penalties if they dither. Another aid in avoiding this is the pause option accessed via the scroll/lock key. The main luxury item is the replay facility. The program selects, stores, and will replay on request, highlights from all games played. 'Luxury item' is something of a misnomer. This is something I suspect which will be in fairly constant use.

The hardware requirements to run this program are pretty stringent. The manual states that a full 640K of *free* RAM is required for the game to function. In truth it will run off about 590K, though this is still a lot when TSRs are taken into account. If memory problems do occur I'd recommend cold booting with DOS 3.30 or lower. Processing speed is not really a problem. The game ticks along nicely even on a 12MHz machine.

Class Of '91

At the end of the time-outs **Joe Montana Football** succeeds superbly in achieving what it sets out to do. The playmaking facility is brilliantly implemented and relatively easy to use. The stats provided are built upon throughout the season making for highly realistic league play. The concept of multi-ownership is a curious one but at least this is optional. The game gets a firm recommendation not only to players looking for hybrid/stats action game, but to anyone interested in the sport itself, especially those seeking one of entry level complexity. This is not to say that the game is simple, more that the documentation is excellent in providing a run through not only of the program, but of the sport itself. A glossary of terms and a quick reference card are also included in the package. Joe Montana is a class act, and **Joe Montana Football** is a class game. SP

JOE MONTANA

The great quarterback discusses game plan 640K

With the great demand on your time, why did you want to take on such a complex software project as ***Joe Montana Football****?*

Joe Montana: Football has been my life. I enjoy games and I love computer games. It's great to have the opportunity to combine football with computers and provide everyone out there the chance to experience what I do on the field.

SP: How long have you been a computer user?

JM: I started 'hacking' about eight years ago. And now I'm nuts about computer games.

SP: Do other players on the San Francisco 49ers play computer games as well?

JM: A lot of the guys bring computer games to football camp. We all compete against each other during the off hours. But at home we just play against the computer.

SP: Going into this project, you knew there were other football games on the market. What makes yours unique?

JM: You're right. I've played other computer football games before, but what I've seen does not compare to the depth and reality of **Joe Montana Football**. It's just like playing the real thing. The sound and graphics are wonderful but most of all it's designed to be entertaining for everyone – regardless of their computer experience or age.

SP: You worked an extensive Instant Replay feature into the game. Why?

JM: If you watch players on the field, in a stadium with a big screen, you'll see them watch the replays. So **Joe Montana Football**'s Instant Replay is a nice feature because you get the chance to go back and look at the plays in slow motion, frame by frame.

SP: One of your greatest abilities is to focus on the receivers downfield while the pass rush closes in on you. How was this incorporated into your game?

JM: My concentration is always down the field – it has to be. So the game features a Receiver Cam. If I start worrying about what the players in front of me are doing, I'd have no idea what the wide receivers and running backs are doing down the field.

Over the years, you realise that it's really more about the colour in front of you than anything else. You're always looking over that. In your subconscious, you feel the colour in front of you. The colour changes quickly, and in most cases you'll see a change. If it stays the opposite colour, you're in trouble.

SP: Your ability to audible and adjust at the line of scrimmage have made you a four-time Super Bowl winner. Are there audibles in ***Joe Montana Football****?*

JM: Absolutely. When you know where your receiver is going to be and you don't like the way the defensive coverage looks or what the protection is, you have to be able to change your selected play. Quarterbacks must have this option, so we put it in.

SP: Is the Playmaker Utility another feature you wanted in this game?

JM: Yes, it's great to have because you can design whatever play you want. If the plays that already come with the game aren't to your liking, you can create your own.

SP: What makes a great play?

JM: When something works, it's a good play. Keep it in. Sometimes, you don't know what makes it, it just happens. Basically, you have to be creative. SP

NEXT ISSUE

Jetfighter II

MicroLEague Baseball – The Manager's Challenge

I Play 3-D Football

European Soccerlaegue

Lance Haffner Boxing

Life and Death II – The Brain

INTERNATIONAL ICE HOCKEY

Puck Off

by John Harrington

THE BLURB on the box claims this is the 'most definitive Ice Hockey game of all time' (how can something be the *most* definitive?). Unfortunately, the skill of the blurb writer far exceeds that of the game designer. Beneath all the hyperbole lies a lamentable attempt at capturing in computer format the violent excitement of the world's fastest team sport.

Although at first glance the game boasts many interesting features that would be of interest to the strategy fan, such as action replays, variable team strategies, league play and, of course, 'player confrontations', they all promise more than they deliver. Do not be fooled: this is an arcade sheep in a strategy wolf's clothing.

Low Tech

With the success of the low-tech **Kick Off** to act as an example, it is incredible how Impulze have missed out with **International Ice Hockey**. Take, for instance, the match action. This takes place in a scrolling window that covers only about one third of the rink, so that players who are off screen are effectively invisible. This makes a passing game virtually impossible. The main skill required seems to be waggling the joystick so that the man in possession can avoid all of the bodies in his way and skate the puck into the goal.

Although a player can choose to control one of several international sides and compete in a league against other national teams, none of these teams have unique strengths or weaknesses, which means the United Arab Emirates side is just as formidable as the Soviet national team. Nor do any of the players on the teams have any personal characteristics, not even player names, so don't expect any player stats.

Bully For You

The strategy element of the game is minimal. The choices are to attack, with or without a goalie, or to defend, with or without a goalie. The rules state that by pressing the F10 key you can pause the game and see what strategies are being adopted by the two teams.

On my copy, pressing the F10 key caused the match to be abandoned. Grudgingly I will admit that the designers have got one or two other things right. The league play element does at least add an extra dimension to what is essentially a one or two player game, while the best thing that can be said about the slow motion replay facility is that it can be turned off. SP

WE LIKE...

Red Baron (PC)

Wayne Grezky 2 (PC, Amiga)

Sim Earth (PC, Mac)

4D Sports Boxing (PC)

Micro League Baseball (PC)

Designed by Gareth Briggs

Published by Impulze

Price £24.99

Available for the ST & Amiga Reviewed on the STE

Omniplay Horse Racing, continued

track builder is that it permits the construction of different *shaped* tracks – all the standard tracks are oval shaped. It also comes with a new track entitled Saddle 3D which apparently is the default track for the jockey competition, though the manual states that all the jockey and horse histories are located on the Track 1 module, and indeed the program requests that this be loaded. All the tracks including any recently constructed can be loaded in via the file requester. However, new tracks can only be used with version 1.1 of the Handicappers module. SporTime will provide free upgrades to registered users.

Anybody interested in Horse Racing and games should not be without a copy of **Omni Play Horse Racing**. The modules are a matter of taste. The Jockey Competition can be recommended to fans of the game, but it is not really the place to start. The Track design is nice to have, but a non essential item. I would have much preferred to see the long promised printer option appear. This would have made the game viable for more than one player. As it is, the perennial problem remains of one player at the screen while the rest sit twiddling their thumbs.

The Amiga graphics and sound are vastly superior to the EGA and squawkbox of the IBM version. The downside is the amount of disk swapping that the Amiga requires especially with a modular program such as this. Because if this I'd strongly recommend making back ups before you get under starters orders. Of course Amiga owners can have a hard disk too. But most such users will probably need a long odds nag to come in before being able to afford such a luxury. SP

THE MEDITERRANEAN CONFLICT

Harpoon Battleset 3

by Sandy Eisen

THE MEDITERRANEAN **Conflict** (Battleset 3) for **Harpoon** was published by Three-Sixty last year as the third add-on expansion program for use with the original game.

The **Med** (for short) significantly expands the countries, units and situations available for players to explore with this excellent simulation of modern air and naval conflict.

The philosophy behind the **Med** appears to be to offer a markedly more varied selection of scenarios than either of the two previous battlesets. This is true both in terms of the size of scenarios, which range from small 'studies' with only a handful of missile boats on each side to full scale Nato/Warsaw Pact air, surface and subsurface war across the entire Mediterranean and Black seas, and also in terms of the great variety of opposing countries and alliances.

New Situations Available

Perhaps the best way to convey the variety of scenarios included in the **Med** is to describe them briefly. The first five are all Nato/Warsaw Pact conflicts with titles such as 'Breakout – USSR exits the Black Sea', 'USSR Wreaks Havoc in the Med' (what the Black Sea fleet did next), and 'USSR Bushwhacks a US Carrier Group' (another way to start the Third World War). These scenarios involve Libya and/or Syria as Soviet allies. This series culminates in 'Come as you are War Start' which involves all the countries included in a snap start to the Third World War.

The next group of three scenarios all feature Western forces against Libya alone. One has a US carrier/surface group with no land-based air cover, another has a US carrier group backed up with F-111s. This is billed as a repeat of the historical 'Reagan Raid' which escalates to a full scale war. Finally the French get a chance to try out a carrier group built around the Clemenceau against the entire Libyan air force. The blurb for this particular scenario does rather illustrate the historical ignorance of the designers as it describes this situation (supposedly arising from a French plane full of movie stars and footballers being hijacked to Libya!) as the French teaching their former colony a lesson.

Two studies are set off the Lebanese coast with a US battleship group in one and a French carrier group in the other each trying to deal with bases backed up by the Syrian air force and navy.

A scenario entitled Allah's Will postulates an anti-Western Jihad with Libya, Egypt and Syria lining up against Italy, France and the US. While I do not find the basic premise implausible, the situation as presented does stretch the imagination by portraying Turkey as a totally solid Western ally, and omitting Israel completely.

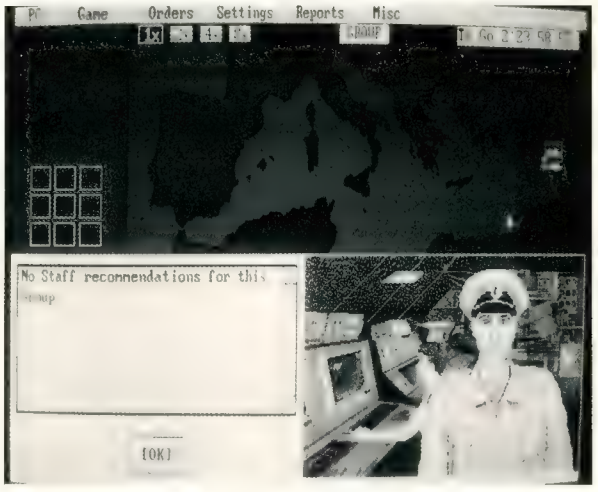
Three scenarios are purely Arab/Israeli affairs. Two of these are studies involving small naval forces only – the air forces are presumed to be busy supporting the ground war. The third entitled 'Jihad '92' is primarily a full scale air war between Israel and an alliance of Syria, Egypt and Libya.

The last two scenarios examine interesting potential regional conflicts not often considered in wargames. These are an Egyptian/Libyan war (provoked by the assassination of Mubarak) and a Greek/Turkish conflict. The cause of the latter is blamed on an incident at a football match, although partisans of both sides might consider that no specific cause is needed.

New Platforms Available

Approximately 60 new ship, submarine and aircraft types are included in the **Med**. Most of these are ship classes for the navies of the countries found only in this battleset, although there are also new submarine classes as well as planes and helicopters. As a result of these additions, many of the Nato and Warsaw pact units which are familiar from previous battlesets have been left out. Such omissions include the Nimitz class carriers and Aegis cruisers of the USN.

The Soviet navy has lost many important ship classes including the Kiev and Kirov, Kresta and Slava class cruisers and the modern Udaloy escorts. Both the US and the Soviets have lost most of their amphibious operations ships and most of their submarine types.



Royal Navy Scrapped!

A far greater disaster has befallen the Royal Navy which has simply vanished. As a result there are no bases available on Gibraltar or Cyprus. There is a excellent selection of over 60 bases included, but I do feel that a small number of the lesser known ones should have been dropped in order to include Gibraltar and Larnaca. I suppose that might have revealed the folly of not bothering to include any British units to station there.

The documentation included with the game suggests that the reason so many unit types were left out was primarily play balance, or part of the 'Peace Dividend'. This is outrageous nonsense! The designers should have the honesty to admit that good as **Harpoon** is, the flawed way in which battlesets store data means that insuf-

Designed by
Mike & Becky Jones, Larry Bond and Don Gilman

Published by
Three-Sixty

Price £24.99

Available for the PC

Available from Strategic Plus and other specialist retailers.

ficient information can be placed in a single battleset.

Vital Units Missing

Ideally the **Med** should still include all the units in the first two battlesets as well as the new ones specific to the Mediterranean countries. Only if this was done would the game be able to claim a proper relationship to the real world. To suggest (as the designers do) that the entire Syrian air force would be hard pressed to penetrate any American task force including an Aegis Cruiser, and therefore no Aegis cruisers are included in the game is ridiculous. Even if such a suggestion were true, then there is all the more reason to include such ships since any US task force operating in Syrian waters would be even more likely to include an Aegis cruiser. Any game claiming to be a serious simulation should permit this, particularly when designing your own (not necessarily balanced) scenarios.

New Ships

The US navy now has the Forrestal class conventionally-powered carrier as a replacement for the nuclear-powered Nimitz. Although the significance of this change is vast in terms of cost and real strategic options, the swop does not have a great impact on game play. Also new are the CGN California and Cimarron oiler class, neither of which can be said to make any great impact. Of greater novelty is the Pegasus class of missile-armed hydrofoils (PHM) and although it is hard to find an important role for these craft in most of the scenarios, interesting experiments on their use can be set up with the Scenario Editor.

New for the Soviet navy are the Moskva and Kara class ASW cruisers, and also Petya-II light frigates and Osa-II missile craft.

The French navy is still in about the same good condition in which it appeared in **North Atlantic Convoys**. The training/helicopter carrier is no longer available, but this is not necessarily a great loss as it is unlikely to see action against opponents like Libya or Syria. The modern Cassard class missile destroyer is new, so that now every destroyer class with more than one member is included. Nuclear powered submarines are included, but no conventional subs.

The Italian navy appears for the first time and is exceptionally well covered with nearly as many ship and submarine types as are allocated to the Soviets. All major surface classes are represented, including the two different air-capable carrier/cruiser flagships the Garibaldi and Vittorio Veneto. As well as most conventional escorts, missile hydrofoils are also available.

In a similar fashion a good job has been done for the navies of Greece, Turkey, Libya, Egypt and Syria. Rather than list the many units covered, I can reassure interested wargamers that all the important types are available. Unfortunately the same cannot be said for the representation of the Israeli navy. Various types of Saar missile boats are the only surface vessels shown. The real Israeli navy includes at least three other classes of missile craft and these are collectively more numerous than all the Saars combined. Israel also operates several missile hydrofoils which are not shown. In effect what has been included is far less than half of the Israeli navy.

We are not told if this has also been done in the name of 'play balance', but it severely diminishes the utility of **Harpoon** as a tool to study the naval balance in the eastern Mediterranean.

New Planes

The Israeli air force is not short changed and has all planes needed for an accurate representation. This includes Skyhawks and Kfirs as new arrivals to **Harpoon** making their debut in the **Med**. Also new are several older Russian aircraft such as the MiG-21 Fishbed, MiG-25 Foxbat, and MiG-27 Flogger which are needed for the air forces of most of the Arab nations. Egypt also requires the Chinese Jian-7 and French Mirage 2000 (also flown by the Greeks) and these are duly included.

The only new aircraft I could spot actually operating on the US or Soviet sides was the replacement of the Tomcat A by the slightly longer-ranged Tomcat D. There are new US-built aircraft types, but these are older models such as Starfighters for the Greeks, Turks and Italians, and Crusaders to fly off the French carriers together with the Super Etendards. There are also a few new helicopters.

Can You Play?

A important point for potential purchasers of any **Harpoon** battleset is that in order to use it you require at least version 1.1 of the game. This appeared quite quickly in the States, but there have been reports of the older version being on sale in the UK. Serious players may wish to consider upgrading to version 1.2 which is available from Three-Sixty in Texas for a nominal charge. This version is supposed to run 'smoother' with fewer bugs. I cannot say I have really noticed the difference. What I have noticed is that it likes more memory than 1.1, as I have some large saved games which will run on 1.1 and not on 1.2. It may therefore be prudent to keep a copy of 1.1 backed up on your hard disc.

The reason for using version 1.2 is that it includes a new menu of extra staff options. These permit sonobuoys and towed sonar arrays to be shown on the tactical map, and allow players to adjust the SAM fire rate and the range at which aircraft will automatically engage enemy planes.

The Future

Currently Three-Sixty is working on Battleset 4 which will cover the Western Pacific *(Since this was written, Three-Sixty has confirmed that the next battleset will be 'The Indian Ocean' – Ed)*. Yes, I would be more interested in the Persian Gulf as well! However officially there are no plans for such a battleset. We must all hope that common sense and sheer commercial reality will make Three-Sixty change its mind, or at least its publication schedule.

So far there is no news of any work in progress to revise **Harpoon** itself. A completely revised version with better AI, a two player option and better information storage so that battleset data could be combined into a unified database would be a certain bestseller. I would bet that most current owners would buy such a game, and **Harpoon** has already sold very well.

There are also no plans for a Second World War era version. If Three-Sixty does not do it, then maybe someone else will. (Witness the way that three year's delay at FTL has effectively allowed SSI to capture the **Dungeonmaster** market on the PC.)

Australian designers are currently rumoured to be working on a game covering Second World War Pacific carrier battles using the lessons of **Harpoon**. I would buy it before reading the reviews, what about you? SP

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TOWER FRA

Air Traffic Controller

by Paul Rigby

THALION'S **Tower FRA** appeared out of the blue with little or no fanfare. It shows how Thalion is dabbling in just about every game genre it can lay its mits on. There are not too many air traffic controller simulators out there, none from a European software house at any rate. Of course, Thalion's only competitor is the venerable **Tracon** (civil) and **Rapcon** (military) from Wesson International – two heavyweight contenders that would require something special if they were to be knocked off their perch. Comparative comments will be made with **Tracon** during the review.

Coming on two disks (a program disk and a data disk) plus a 78-page manual **Tower FRA** (**FRA** from now on) does not give you too much confidence after the first impression. **Tracon**'s large format manual is well designed and laid out with a variety of realistic navigation charts for all of the areas covered within the simulation. **FRA**'s manual is bland in comparison. There are no charts and the only illustrations are simplified, illustrated drawings of the screen. **FRA** does not offer you any goodies either, whereas **Tracon** provides a neat tutorial tape. In addition, on UK release **Tracon** was offered for sale along with a European Sector disk in addition to the sectors provided in the US. Although Thalion promise that data disks are on the way there are no extra disks available at present. No conclusions can really be drawn from this but it breeds confidence in the post-programming support of the company if data disks are supplied alongside the main game.

FRA, after booting, presents a menu of name slots to complete (eight flight controllers can be entered). After that users will see a difficulty level menu plus secondary icons. The difficulty level increases with the wage level chosen. This is a more structured and, possibly, satisfying approach than **Tracon** offers. **FRA** provides ten difficulty levels with the more difficult levels including bad weather zones, emergency cases and even hijacks! Players will be required to play longer to successfully complete the level (from 5 to 25 minutes). **Tracon** is a little more conservative in its choice, offering direct alteration of the variables such as pilots, the weather and so on.

Back to **FRA**. At the base of the screen is a window showing a view of the chosen airport. Clicking on it shuffles through the other airports on offer – there are four German airports on the data disk while **Tracon** offered a larger scale showing five airports on screen at once.

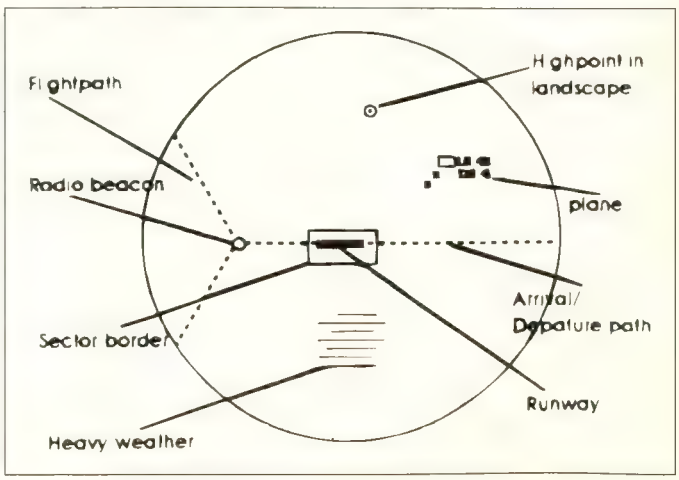
Play can be started at any of four stations: on the grand scale that covers the airport and its surrounding areas, the tower, departure or approach.

The radar screen in **FRA** is so large that you only see a portion of it at any one time. Moving the mouse to the extremities of the screen will flip to the ends of the screen, plus any other information such as the control-strips illustrating what aircraft are in the area and their height, speed and so on.

I never thought I'd say this but the voice output from the Amiga is not as good as the PC speaker used in **Tracon**! **Tracon** uses digitised voices that, through the coarse PC speaker, sound just like the inside of a Cessna cabin while the Amiga uses that grotty robotic voice accessed via the SAY! utility.

Orders can be given by clicking on the iconic representation of the aircraft on the radar or on the control-strip. A box pops up with all of the aircraft's info plus options enabling orders to be given alterating height, speed and so on. After this you click on the OK gadget, the box disappears and another synthesised voice relays these orders to the aircraft concerned. I'll say this for **FRA**: the interface is far better than **Tracon** (with its complex key combinations and iffy mouse commands).

Tower FRA is a good effort from Thalion. There are many other features included that I haven't had space to mention. If I had the choice between **FRA** and **Tracon** I would probably choose the latter on the grounds of a wider play area, more realistic voice output and a more professional feel to the whole design. However, **FRA** should not be ignored as it manages to squeeze a lot on to its two disks. Anybody interested in this field of simulation would be wise to check it out. SP



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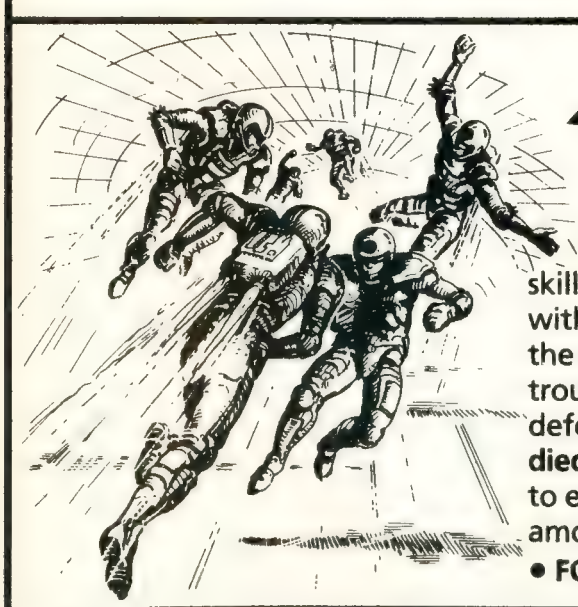

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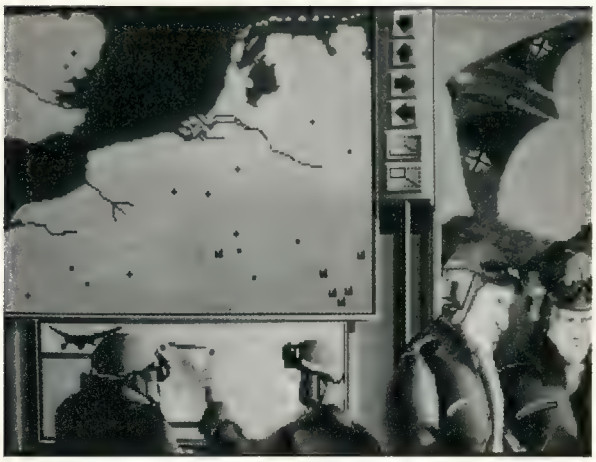

Lucasfilms design team study their plans for Secret Weapons of the Luftwaffe

Secret weapons of Monkey Island

Lucasfilm Games' line-up of titles for 1991 includes a new adventure for Indiana Jones – even though there will be no more Indy movies – in which our intrepid hero explores the mysteries of Atlantis.

While Indy explores ancient history, Guybrush Threepwood lives it in the sequel to **The Secret of Monkey Island**. The original game witnessed the demise of the evil ghost pirate, LeChuck, at the hand of your Guybrush and an agitated bottle of root beer. Guybrush doesn't have long to rest on his laurels, however, because blood is thicker than root beer and LeChuck's brother is out for revenge.

The sequel sees the reappearance of some of the first game's favourite characters, Stan, the previously-owned ship salesman, and Governor Marley, just to name a few. The game also features a new cast of grog-guzzling characters and a multitude of never-before visited, puzzlepacked islands which hold the secrets to Guybrush's safety.

Meanwhile, the Amiga version of the original **Monkey Island** is due for release any day now. This will *not* be a direct port but will instead take advantage of the Amiga's special features.

The next new game from Lucasfilms will be **Secret Weapons of the Luftwaffe**, which the company describes as its most advanced Second World War air combat simulator yet. Soon after the release of the game this spring, Lucasfilm Games will ship a special disk of advanced missions for die-hard air combat fans. To be used in conjunction with the **Secret Weapons** game, the data disk will provide players with a variety of expert battle scenarios. Shifting from the 1940s to the 1990s, three of Lucasfilms' previous graphic adventures will be available for CD-TV in 1991. **Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade**, **Loom** and **The Secret of Monkey Island** will be developed by Lucasfilm Games and published by Commodore.

Topical logic

After taking a break from adventures to work on educational products Topolologika is back. Watch out for a rise in the sales of Anadin. Coming your way in May are a series of compilations for the ST. **Countdown to Doom** and **Philosopher's Quest** will appear on one disk; **Return to Doom** (only) on a second; **Last Days of Doom** and **Hezarin** on a third; **Acheton** and **Kingdom of Hamil** (no doom on this disk) on a fourth; **Avon** and **Murdac** on a fifth, and **Giantkiller** on a sixth. The two game packs will cost £19.95, and single gamepacks £14.95.

In addition to these, Topo will be releasing a new adventure in the Autumn entitled **Spycatcher** which was inspired by Peter Wright's book of the same name. This will be released on all sorts of obscure formats (what's a BBC?), but readers who own an IBM or an Atari ST will be relieved to hear that their machines are catered for.

The real shock news is that the version for something known as the Archie will contain *graphics*! Topo is quick to point out, however, that these are included for 'atmosphere only'. Phew!

BITS

New course disks for Links are now available through US Gold, priced at £15.99. The first such disk will feature the Firestone course.

Two new game titles are being released to coincide with the launch of CD-TV. These are Psycho Killer and Hound of the Baskervilles. Priced at £29.99, these will be available from On-line.

To coincide with the start of the new cricket season, Soundware Inc is releasing a simulator for the 1Mb Amiga, priced at £29.99. The emphasis in the game is on action rather than management. Full review plus screen shots in our next issue.

The new Harpoon battleset is provisionally titled Indian Ocean, and will be released this autumn for the IBM PC. Battleset 4 will take in the Middle East and feature forces from the USA, UK and USSR. The focus of this new battleset will be on air ops.

European Superleague

Two new soccer games have been released recently. One is the Italian **I Play 3-D Soccer,** released in this country through Impressions, plus a new management game entitled **European Superleague,** brought to you by CDS.

Both these games are available on all formats and will be reviewed in full in our next issue.

Sim can can

Latest releases from Simulations Canada are **Battle Tank – Kursk to Berlin** and **Pacific Storm – The Solomons Campaign. Battle Tank** features prebuilt scenarios and a 'build your own' system, while **Pacific Storm** uses a new windowed interface. Although these games are purely text based, they are thoroughly researched and Sim Can is known for the quality of the artificial intelligence in its games. Both games are available for the PC, ST and Amiga, price £35.

Floor 13

In a democratic society like our own, how does an elected government appear to keep its popularity *(simple: it doesn't – Ed).* How are scandals averted, subversive elements controlled, undesirables eliminated and 'incidents' covered up. Housed on the thirteenth floor of an anonymous new office block, deep in the heart of docklands is an organisation that does not officially exist. This is the premise of the new strategy simulation game from Virgin Mastertronic: **Floor 13** which puts the player in the role of the head of this sinister organisation. Programmed by PSS software, **Floor 13** will be released on the Virgin Games label in late 1991 on all formats.

Sierra and Brøderbund merger off

Contrary to our report last issue, Sierra On-Line and Brøderbund software will *not* be merging after all. Ken Williams, Sierra's president, and Brøderbund's chairman Doug Carlston were said to be 'disappointed' at the turn of events. The merger failed when it proved impossible to integrate the two management structures.

Battle Isle

Ubisoft

Battle Isle is a new strategy game from UbiSoft, France, that combines elements of wargaming with those of an abstract strategy game. The action takes on two randomly generated islands. The objective is to demolish the production facilities or headquarters of the enemy, who may be human or non human.

The player has at his disposal aircraft carriers, mines, destroyers, and Sacha Distel records (play them and the enemy becomes incontinent). All but one of this force is mobile and can be used to accomplish specific actions. Damaged units may be repaired in warehouses built by construction teams.

Transport units are in charge of supplying energy to the warehouses, factories and headquarters. If a factory lacks energy, it will no longer be able to produce goods. A player says *au revoir* once his headquarters has been exhausted of its energy reserves. Terrain is a big factor in determining whether or not actions succeed. Mountains, rivers, and *le pudding anglais* reduce mobility, while units can be restricted by zones of control.

The split screen graphics in the game are excellent: tanks look like tanks, and factories, well, look like factories. The combat sequences have a distressingly arcade appearance, though the emphasis here is firmly on brain power. **Battle Isle** will be available shortly for the Amiga and ST.

Warriors of the road fight it out in Battle Isle

Conspiracy: The Deadlock Files

Accolade

This new release from Accolade claims to be the first 'fully digitised advetnure game with 256 colour Video Graphics'.

The game presents first person perspective of real life locations, in this case New York City.

The player assumes the role of an average Joe/Joanne who is thrust unwillingly into a conspirational plot to overthrow the US Government. Linked to this is the murder of a CIA agent for whom the aforementioned pleb is scheduled to take the rap. The murder was actually carried out by a cabal of international financiers with world domination and Fiona Wright on their minds. The player objective is to recover the deadlock files which will prove his/innocence.

Within a twenty four hour time frame, the game moves from Wall St to the Empire State Building to the grittiest boroughs, docks, and back streets of Gotham, as the player attempts to avoid the enemy and stay ahead of the Old Bill. **Conspiracy: The Deadlock Files** is available for the IBM PC. Full review next issue.

Having a blast with New York's First Lady: Conspiracy

Robotop!

Maxis

Humans crave senseless violence and destruction. They revel in competition. They find pleasure in the planning and execution of battles. They need war. To allow Humans to remain true to their violent natures, and to prevent them from destroying themselves, the planet, and ourselves, we the Robots hereby institute RoboSport!

Set in a futuristic time in which robots do battle for the amusement of humans, **RoboSport** is a battle simulation game that combines the tactical challenge of chess with the intensity of urban guerilla warfare. Program maneuvers for as many as four teams, of up to eight robots each using a point and click icon interface. Robots can battle the computer's robot teams, programmed to be crafty, defensive, ferocious, or stupid. Or, play against your friends (who may demonstrate these same characteristics) on a single computer, on two computers over a serial or modem link. Robots battle in 24 arenas of three basic types: the manicured streets of a suburb; the rubble of a devastated town; or a giant computer motherboard.

RoboSport will be coming soon on the Mac and PC.

Trashing the town in RoboSport

LINE IN THE SAND

Gulf Diplomacy

by Brian Walker

THE REACTION of most people, at their politest, upon espying this gulf war game is along the lines of 'it didn't take them long'. The implication is that TSR are in the business of making a quick buck whenever and wherever they can. In fact the merest glance at the component quality is enough to dispel this notion, while a reading of the rules should banish it completely.

A Line in the Sand offers 2-6 players the chance to recreate or reshape recent history, both militarily and diplomatically. The former is based around the 2-4 player game and will be instantly familiar to anyone who has played **Red Storm Rising**. The two player game stars Iraq vs The Rest and is based on the events in the gulf circa August 1990. The Allied objective is to capture two cities (perm from Kuwait City, Basra and Baghdad) within six turns. The Iraqi player wins by stopping them.

An alternative scenario offers the Allied player victory if he can knock out Iraq's Chemical Weapon and Nuclear production facility. Iraq can win by preventing this *or* controlling two sites in Saudi Arabia. Both these scenarios are die rolling slugfests. The attacker rolls a D10; hits occur when the number rolled is less than, or equal to that unit's attacking strength. The defender does not, in fact, defend, but attacks on his turn. Both the combat and movement system in the basic two player game are the same as for the multi-player game. The three player game pits two Arab players against Israel. In this scenario, victory is determined by points scoring – two for every opposing site captured. The four player game adds another Arab player to the previous scenario and the Israeli player acquires US military support.

While all the basic scenarios are perfectly satisfactory the real value lies in the full six player diplomatic game. In this there are six factions present: Israelis, US & Allies, Moderate Arabs and Turkey, Iraq and Yemen, and last but not least, the Volatile Arabs. At the outset after sides have been chosen, each faction randomly selects his 'war aim'. As these can be any of three it can be seen that the uncertainty and distrust so characteristic of the region is already accurately simulated.

After set-up the turn order is randomly determined. A number of unusual elements in the game system now begin to present themselves. For one thing, players are not allowed to discuss tactics secretly – highly unusual in a diplomatic game. Instead, diplomatic pouches are provided for each faction. If one faction wishes to communicate with another in private they must write a message on the pad provided and slip it into the pouch.

Saddam Shame

The Jihad and War Fever tracks are the key to victory for most factions. Until the War Fever scale reaches 2 the US and Allies cannot even move, and it must reach 10 before they can attack. The manipulation of these tracks is achieved by a combination of military action and diplomatic gestures.

In the game played for the purposes of this review your scribe, playing the Iranian faction, needed to raise the Jihad scale to 10. If this could be achieved *and* ten non Muslim units eliminated, then victory would go to the Mad Mullahs of Tehran.

Unfortunately the Iranian army has been severely depleted by the recent war with Iraq, and their (lack of) strength reflects this. Their real power lies in diplomatic gestures, ie manipulating others to do their bidding.

The neighbouring Iraqi victory conditions were to invade and hold Kuwait. To ensure the Jihad scale remained high the Iranian faction decided to move though Iraq to attack the Zionist imperialists. Unfortunately the dim Iraqi player misread their intentions and refused permission. Lacking support, the Jihad scale dropped to zero at which point the Iraqi faction rolled to see if a revolution occurred on the streets of Baghdad. Sure enough it did, leaving the moderate Arabs in charge and Saddam and the Iraqi player out on their collective asses.

This example shows the extent to which factions are dependent on each other and nowhere is this interdependence more apparent than in the victory conditions. For example, the Iraqis could have had the same victory conditions as the Iranians. However, even if these had been achieved the Iranians could have subsequently scuttled the Iraqis by clandestinely helping the US to invade, stirring up a revolution so that the Moderate Arabs could invade.

Whenever an attack or invasion occurs for the first time, the War Fever track and/or the Jihad track are affected. If the Israelis attack an Arab faction the Jihad moves up which is against their long term interest. All factions face such checks and balancing mechanisms none of which appear too schematic. Indeed the game system is quite remarkable for the way it simulates the chaos and confusion of the region.

The combat system, which is the same as in the basic game, takes in naval and air attacks as well as nuclear and chemical assaults.

Surgical Carpets

Although it moves along at a fair pace **A Line in the Sand** is still a long game when playing the diplomatic option, probably taking around six to seven hours to conclude. This would not be such a problem were it not for

continued opposite

Diplomatic game designed by R N Flint Dille

Basic game design by Paul A Lidbergh

Published by TSR

Price £19.95

2-6 players

SHERLOCK HOLMES

The Card Game

by Theo Clarke

IT WAS a bitterly cold and frosty morning during the winter of '97 that I was awakened by a tugging at my shoulder. It was Holmes. The candle in his hand shone upon his eager, stooping face and told me at a glance that something was amiss.

'Come, Watson, come!' he cried. 'The game is afoot. Not a word! Into your clothes and come!' How else could **Sherlock Holmes – The Card Game** start?

Each player holds six cards. One of the hands will include a villain card. That player is the villain but nobody else knows this as the game opens. The player holding The Game Is Afoot card starts the game. At the foot of the card the word MOVE indicates that the next card must be a movement card. If the next player has such a card it can be played; if not, an extra card is collected from the deck. A movement card is followed by a location card. Other cards follow location cards and so on.

Every card has a points value. Most range from 1 to 15 but the villains and some other special cards range from 20 to 50. The object of the game is to have the fewest points left in your hand when a villain is arrested. The arresting detective deducts the value of the villain and the felon adds this value to his score (all the characters are male).

Violent Cases

Information cards such as clues, telegrams, disguises and suspicions can be used to increase other players' hands or gain information about their holdings. Action cards usually lead to arrests. An unsuccessful arrest occurs when an arrest card is played on a player who does not hold a villain card. The disappointed detective adds the innocent party's cards to his own hand and the accused draws the same number from the deck. A successful arrest ends the game.

As well as the original villain card there are three more scattered through the deck and these come into play as players pick up cards. When suspected or arrested it is possible to counter the effect by playing an alibi card but the alibi causes every player to pass one card to the left. This usually results in villain cards changing hands and it is not unknown to pass on Milverton (20 points) only to receive Moriarty (50). At least Moriarty now knows where Milverton is!

The game moves fast and there is little time for subtle analysis. Even if there were such an opportunity it would be rendered worthless by the appearance of one of the three Thick Fog cards. The confusion caused by the famous fogs of Victorian London is simulated by shuffling all the hands together and redealing the same number back to each player. Players are left just as close to going out but they no longer know very much. The Thick Fog card epitomises the spirit of the game. It reduces the skill element while greatly increasing the fun.

A Study In Charm

The rules are simple and the cards are designed to allow play without reference to the rules. Each card states its effect and lists the cards that can follow it. The rules booklet is eight A5 pages but one of those is the cover illustration and half the booklet is given over to charming descriptions of the source of each illustration on the cards. The illustrations are selected from the Strand Magazine, the first issue of which was published in July 1891 and contained *A Study In Scarlet*, the very first Sherlock Holmes story.

We have played the game with varying numbers of players from three to eight. Every game generated laughter. Indeed, were it not for the difficulty of reading the cards in low light, this would be an ideal pub game for drinkers who do not choose a sedate lounge bar. SP

Published by Gibsons

Price £8.99

3-8 players

Line in the Sand, continued

some of the unique problems that the Iranians and the Iraqi factions face. In our game they were effectively finished at the end of turn four. Making up the numbers for the remaining eight turns is not much fun. In fairness to the game system this was due to the catastrophic error by the Iraqi player. In a 'normal' game each faction should be there at the last.

The positive points of the game are many. The component quality, especially the mapboard, is outstanding. The rules are clearly presented and what ambiguities that do exist are minor. Examples of play are plentiful and the conversational style permits a learn as you play approach. Despite the almost obligatory dedication ('to the brave men and women etc') the game is commendably free of patriotic claptrap or bias. The hidden agenda of the Allies is presented as impartially as the expansionist policies of Iraq. But to players looking for an accurate combat simulation, it is doubtful if this game will pass muster. However, to those who don't give a camel's hump about 'surgical strikes' and 'carpet bombing', but who enjoy some wild diplomatic action that has the advantage of simulating the craziness of the participating factions, then **A Line in the Sand** gets a definite recommendation. SP

SHATTERED STATES

House Of Cards

by Brian Walker

SHATTERED States is a game that 'combines the skill of chess, the craftiness of cards, and the luck of the dice' claims the box blurb. It is also a game that merges the component quality of a Woolworths compendium with the contents of Christmas cracker from Tesco's. The 'map' is actually not really a map at all, but a coloured piece of paper divided into rectangles. And as for the cards, I've seen bus tickets with higher production values. All this might be acceptable in a game costing under a tenner but at £24.95 it would need to be Hall of Fame material to get even a tentative recommendation and this, **Shattered States**, most certainly is not.

The game posits the view that America is divided after some sort of economic catastrophe (the Third World is blamed – all that cheap labour must have finally revolted). The exact synopsis is somewhat confused, but no matter. The important thing is that America must be reunited. The first step in the reunification process is to tear off all the millions of perforated cards which form the basis of the game.

The set-up is quite simple with each player selecting two areas on the 'board'. Units are represented by tiny cardboard counters. The victory conditions are as follows: a player wins when he has control of at least ten states at the end of a complete turn. Alternatively commencing with turn 6, two dice are thrown and if the total is less than the turn number, the game ends there and then with the player who owns the largest number of states winning.

£ S D

A turn consists of ten phases with most of these involving some sort of card play. Each state has a special power in addition to a grain and monetary value. The grain determines how many units you receive each turn. Cash is only used for buying more cards. What all the ten phases boil down to is this: someone plays a card on someone else and the recipient attempts to defend against it by playing a counter card. The only other phase which differs wildly is combat and movement. Combat consists of a die roll modified by cards, plus some minor modifiers for terrain. The attacker, if victorious, moves into the newly conquered territory.

A simple game, but why then is it all so madcap? The answer lies in the cards. Cards come at you from all directions in a whirlwind of modifier madness. There is no real game system as such, you just play a card and hope for a lucky die roll. Any coherent strategy is impossible. So much for 'the skill of chess'. Underneath all the cardboard there is probably an average game of territorial conquest. Unfortunately, as has become the way with American 'hobby' games, the designers did not know when to stop. It's as though they got all their friends and anyone who was passing at the time to contribute a card and a 'wacky' instruction: 'Sell drugs to your opponent to mess up his perceptions and add one to the die roll' urges one such card. If any of your opponents have drugs to sell then I'd recommend buying a few before trying this game. Preferably uppers. A turn lasts about 30 minutes so a four hour game is entirely possible – a daunting prospect without some form of stimulant. The conclusion is that the title of the game refers to the collective mood of the players come game end. SP

Designed by
Karsten Engleman and David Spencer

Published by
Engleman Military Simulations

Price £24.95

2-6 players

Playing time: 2-4 hours

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PRO FOOTBALL FANTASM

Overtime Out

by John Harrington

HERE WE have something I thought I'd never see: a gridiron game for the fan who thinks Avalon Hill's **Statis Pro Football** is for cissies. In terms of detail and complexity, **Pro Football Fantasm** leaves the previous hard-core champion back on third and long. However, **Fantasm** takes about twice as long to play as **Statis Pro**, clocking in at about 6 hours for the advanced level, which means it is not so much a simulation of Monday Night Football as Monday Night & Tuesday Morning Football.

The game comes equipped with an unmounted gridiron board, team display sheets (on which the player cards are placed), dice, 1008 highly detailed individual player cards (36 for each NFL team), 36 offensive play cards, plus numerous strategy cards and play aids, such as solitaire play-calling charts. If this is not enough you can send off to Fantasm games for supplementary goodies. Clearly this is a labour of love, a game devised by enthusiasts for enthusiasts.

The game system works as follows. The coach on offence chooses an offensive play card, whilst the defensive coach simultaneously selects a defensive strategy. The offensive play card has on it a 20 x 10 matrix, detailing all of the possible outcomes of the play. The result of the play is determined by rolling a 20-sided die (D20) and a 10-sided die (D10) and cross referencing the numbers on the matrix. Depending on the suitability of the defence called, the D20 die roll may be modified to the advantage of the offence or defence (low numbers are better for the defence).

In the advanced version of the game, each row of the matrix also specifies a player skill match-up which may modify the result of the D10. For instance, row 20 of the 'Quarterback Bootleg' offensive play card requires that the scramble rating of the quarterback be added to the D10 while the tackle rating of the free safety (if there is one) is deducted. Thus the plethora of different ratings on the player cards are cleverly brought into play. Even the linemen, the great unsung heroes of the game, are rated according to their effectiveness in five types of pass rush situation and their proficiency at seven different run blocks or run defences.

By assessing the variety of match-ups on each offensive card, a coach can endeavour to run plays that make the most of his team's strengths, or capitalise on his opponent's weak areas. However, nothing is certain: you are at the mercy of the dice. For instance, you may run a sweep hoping to benefit from the high 'pull' ratings of your guards, but there is only a 30% chance of this match-up occurring on the play. The die result may well instead call for your running back's 'power run' rating to be matched against the defensive end's tackle rating. This random aspect can be frustrating for the sort of player who likes to have complete control over the execution of the plays, but it is realistic, and sooner or later smart play calling should reap its reward.

Given the range of plays available and the variety of skill ratings provided for each football player, the truly dedicated gridiron fan might be forgiven for thinking that this game would be more aptly titled **Pro Football Orgasm**. However the slowness of play is a major bummer. Rolling dice and referring to tables is not as rapid a play resolution system as the Fast Action Cards used by other games, whilst a number of other tempting optional rules, if used, also soak up more time. Furthermore, in a system as flexible as this there are inevitably a few blanks in the rules, the most glaring of which is the lack of explanation of how blitzes work. Fantasm Sports suggest that all rule ambiguities be resolved through the application of common sense, but this may not prove so easy for non-Americans to do. However, I can only imagine this game appealing to out-and-out gridiron fans so expert interpretation of the rules should not be a problem.

Pro Football Fantasm may be the last great gridiron boardgame to appear before this type of simulation is left in the hands of number crunching computers. The level of complexity certainly matches that of any computer gridiron game I have seen, and the 'flavour' of the game is definitely enhanced by being able to see all the numbers and dice rolls, in contrast to the often sterile play resolution of computer games, but the price you pay is a simulation that takes twice as long to play as the real thing. One for the wealthy, retired, fanatical gridiron stats fan. SP

Published by Fantasm Sports

Price £24.99

1-2 players

NEXT ISSUE

Bauernschlau

Die Bosse

Droids

Spanish Main

Stockbroker

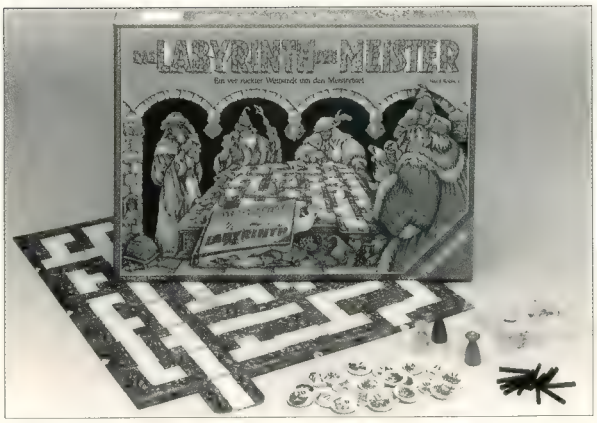
Le Passereux

ACROSS THE BOARD

Three new boardgames reviewed by Brian Walker

DAS LABYRINTH DER MEISTER

One of the most charming games of the eighties was Ravensburger's **Labyrinth**. It was simple yet challenging, beautifully produced, and the sort of game you could play with your children without feeling too embarrassed about. Now comes **Das Labyrinth der Meister** which sees the game board looking even prettier and the game*play* beefed up.



Both games are part of what might be termed the 'maze' genre. The board is constantly shifting as new tiles are inserted. Players must attempt to negotiate a path through the labyrinth by judicious insertion of tiles. The objective is capture the treasure pieces that lay scattered around the board. The main difference between this and its predecessor is that now there are 24 treasure tokens. These are numbered 1 to 20, plus there is a token marked 25. After randomly placing these players must attempt to collect these in order. Another tweak is that each player receives a card containing three numbers. A twenty point bonus is awarded for every piece of treasure collected that matches the numbers on the cards.

By chance our playgroup misread the German rules and placed all the treasure markers *face down* when they should have been placed face up, thus inadvertently transforming the game into one where memory plays a large part. Despite most of the participants having lost their powers of recall so long ago that I can't remember, it was unanimously agreed that this 'error' made for a superior game. Truly aMAZEing!

DRUNTER & DRÜBER

It's always a pleasure a receive a game designed by Klaus Teuber. Even more so when the publisher is Hans im Glück. Their combined skills have produced **Drunter & Drüber**, a nice easy to learn game in the German tradition. The game board depicts a mythical German village dotted with strange looking buildings.

Each player is accountable for the preservation of a particular type of building (this is decided by card draw) all of which have a point value marked on the board. No one knows who is responsible for what. Players then draw tiles of varying sizes at random. These depict walls, rivers, and roads. In addition, vote cards are dealt out. Each turn players must place a tile on the board and move their playing onto it. Sometimes this will cover a building much to the chagrin of the owner. Any anger over such wanton destruction must be repressed if ownership is to remain secret. However, if a loo (which are always unowned) is about to be demolished en route, then players may vote in an attempt to block this and thus any subsequent demolition caused by the tile placement. Vote cards are finite so must be used carefully.

At the game end players reveal their building card and then tot up the points value of the remaining buildings on the board. My colleague Ian Livingstone described the game as being 'a cross between dominos and **Heimlich & Co**'. This is a reasonably accurate description of a moderately entertaining game that, had it been produced in the UK, would have been a cause for celebration. However, perhaps because we have been spoiled by so many excellent games of German origin, it has a rather run-of-the-mill feeling about it. There is nothing actually wrong with it, but then nothing particulary exciting about it either.

EXPRESS

The game of rummy has been used as the basis for all sorts of unlikely thematic games. The most absurd was

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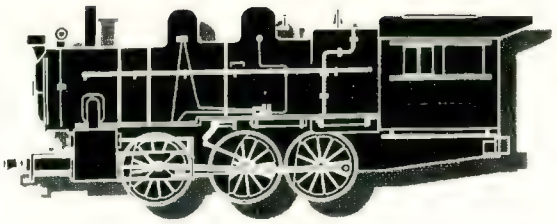

Dallas involving, of course, the even more absurd Ewing family. The latest effort to hitch a wagon onto the rummy train is **Express** from Mayfair games supremo and railroad buff, Darwin Bromley. The variant here is to construct a train containing the same, or at least similar types of wagons (for wagons read suits). Despite the seemingly incongruous transplant it actually works quite well. Additionally, the non standard cards which have been added (such as the turntable card which immediately reverses the play order) add a little extra to play. And believe me, this game needs all the help it can get. Like most rummy based games it tends to play itself once the opening cards have been laid down.

The turns on which a player went 'out', varied alarmingly in our games: on one occasion after just three or so turns, yet on another almost 45 minutes after the deal! The latter resulted in a yawnfest as players struggled to stay awake while they waited for the right card. The consensus view was that as a rummy variant it is quite a good one, and that if you like that game then you'll probably like **Express**. The good quality card stock and nice graphics are also points in its favour. SP

DAS LABYRINTH DER MEISTER
Designed by Max J Kobbert
Published by Ravensburger
Price £10.95

DRUNTER & DRÜBER
Designed by Klaus Teuber
Published by Hans im Glück
Price £24.99
2-4 players
Playing time 45 minutes

EXPRESS
Designed by Darwin Bromley
Published by Mayfair Games
Price £8.99

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SOLAR TRADER

Reach For The Stars

by Gordon Sweeney

SOLAR TRADER is a simple 2-6 player trading game. Players attempt to be the first to journey to the mysterious planetoid Zastra and bring back a solar crystal to the energy starved Earth. To do this, a player must first make enough money to upgrade his ship then travel to the furthest reaches of the solar system to collect a good cargo for the final journey.

In all, there are nine legal commodities to trade as well as two contraband substances – tobacco and alcohol! These are represented by high quality plastic pieces. The board, showing the solar system, is colourful and fairly attractive although a trifle Ludo-ish in appearance. The credit notes are somewhat plain and flimsy, but the six trading information cards are superb.

Each of the nine planets is the source market for a particular legal commodity. Goods can be sold on two other worlds – at an intermediate price on one and a higher price on another. When sold at the higher price they are immediately consumed and reappear on the source planet. Otherwise they remain where sold. In this way commodities gradually get dispersed around the board.

Movement is simple – roll a D10 (a D20 if you have a rocket booster) and move the appropriate number of squares. There are many squares which trigger special effects such as rolling on the uncertainty table. These can make or break your entire game so be warned!

Other features of **Solar Trader** that add to the interest are the vortex, the black hole and the Lunar security police. Players can dump cargo instead of being drawn into the black hole. These items can then be picked up by any craft that enters it. After missing two turns, ships in the black hole randomly pop up again at one of ten spots in the solar system.

In case you hadn't realised already, there is a lot of luck in **Solar Trader**. If yours is one of the last ships to move when several players are involved, you might have to go a long way to buy your first cargo. This would probably put you out of the game if not for the fact that one die roll can bring disaster or salvation at almost any time. The only tricky bit is judging when the endgame has started – in other words that you've made enough money and it's about time you tried to get to Zastra. You may have to do some number crunching here to work out how you can buy all that you need.

To sum up, despite some nice pieces, **Solar Trader** is fine if you just want a 'roll the die and move your dobber' type of game but is really nothing special. It is tighter and more interactive with more players but one or two of them will often never be in contention. SP

Published by Solar Games

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2-6 players

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Jeux Sans Frontières

Brian Walker takes French leave of his senses

BOARDGAMING in the UK received something of a fillip in the late eighties with the discovery, and subsequent importation, of German games. After being swamped for so long by jaded-looking American games and UK junk, the beautifully produced Teutonic offerings provided welcome relief and variety. Come this summer it looks as though the UK will be saying *bonjour* to a new invasion. That's right, the French are coming, though they won't be making a big song and dance about it.

Vive Les Différences!

There has always been a vague awareness that something was happening in France gameswise, though nobody was quite sure what. Part of the mystery was due to the eclectic nature of French gaming, best exemplified by the magazine *Jeux et Strategie* which appeared to cover everything from software to tiddlywinks. The emergence of fanzines, and more seriously, the specialist role-playing/wargaming magazine *Casus Belli*, made inroads into *J&S*'s circulation which were to prove terminal.

The diversity which characterises French gaming is still very much alive, however, and could be seen to good effect at *6th Nationale des Jeux de Reflexion* (games for thinkers) in Paris recently. This itself was a small part of a huge modelling exhibition where trains and boats and planes were the main items. The bridge between these seemingly incongruous elements and games was provided by miniature figures. As the Fair was due to run for some 9 days with an anticipated attendance of 220 000, it can be seen that exhibiting their wares was a pretty smart move by the gaming community. On one hand they were able to cater to their existing market and at the same time sell to an entirely new one. And make no mistake, there were plenty of curious punters flocking around the stands.

Euro Crowd

The most flocked around was that of Eurogames, a relatively new company put together by the dynamic Duccio Vitale. Lest this seem a tad sycophantic, ask yourself, how many companies set out their stall with 18 new titles? Perhaps 'new' is a slight exaggeration for many of these appeared originally under the banner of the late unlamented International Team. However, the rules to these games have not only been rewritten, but the games themselves have undergone extensive redevelopment. In short, they now work. One of these, **Zargos**, was the subject of a national tournament involving nearly four hundred players. It is typical of Mon Vitale's extravagance and generosity that he hopes to offer a trip to Rio for the carnival as first prize.

Also doing good business was Ludodelire whose track record includes **Full Metal Planete** and **Supergang** – two highly original and imaginative games. As at Eurogames, 'budget' is a word that does not seem to exist when it comes to production. Even some of the German offerings look mundane when compared to **Monte Carlo Grand Prix**, 'Ludo's' new release. This features artwork by one of France's top graphic artists plus ten miniature replicas of **F1** cars. The **Monte Carlo** track is but one of several in what is intended to be a modular system. No paper maps here, all the tracks will be published on top quality card stock. Apart from the stunning production two other elements made the game stand out from the pack: firstly, it can accommodate up to ten players, and secondly the strategy revolves around correct gear selection rather than pure speed.

S uccès Esthétique

The use of high quality graphic artists is something which not only appeals to the aesthete, but represents sound commercial thinking – France has built up a highly profitable export industry as a purveyor of luxury goods, while their own moneyed classes refuse to settle for anything containing the merest hint of tack. Mon Vitale also has plans to involve the artistic community in France in some of his future projects. In particular some of the wayward geniuses that lurk within the form know as *Bandes Desinée* – comics to you, squire but the *Dandy* and the *Beano* they ain't – in France comics are regarded as a major modern art form.

It will come as no great surprise when I say that the British presence at the Fair was virtually non existent. The UK distributors, in that quaint British way, still regard Europe as 'foreign'. And yet, they are quite content to accept all the ugly cardboard dross that the Americans throw at them. Our retailers for their part (with a few notable exceptions), just sit on their collective bums whining about computer games and the decline of the hobby. 1992? *C'est maintenant. Allez!* SP

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Hungry

Can we please see an interview of Hungary's finest games designer – Lario Lopf in *Strategy Plus*!

Nathan Cubitt
Great Yarmouth
Norfolk NR30 4BB

Lario is a very busy man, even though he only brings a game out every April.

Battlescam

I must admit that I have only just begun reading *Strategy Plus* from issue #6, although I'm now a dedicated fan.

The interview with Ezra Sidran was interesting, as was the article on AI. It did surprise me, though, that there was no mention of the Battlescapes games.

Anyway, now on to some questions:

1) Is there an ancients naval wargame available for the Amiga, which allows oared vessels to grapple and ram? If so, what is it called and how much does it cost?

2) Why is there a price increase of £5 between the Battlescape games written by Arc, and those by PSS. Although the former includes a 'free' pen, these titles are, after all, almost identical in design and gameplay.

S N Hardy
Sheffield S31 8LZ

*1) The only such naval wargame we know of is **Wooden Ships and Iron Men** from Avalon Hill. Like many of that company's products it is based on a boardgame. Also like that company's products, it has been allowed to languish the world of 8-bit.*

2) Different publishers obviously have different pricing policies.

Top ranking

First I would like to say that *Strategy Plus* is a great magazine for wargamers like myself, and to prove it I have already subscribed. The reviews are first class and clear.

I would like your advice on a Napoleonic strategic game, and a second world war game against Japan. I would also like your views on a modern global warfare game.

Best of luck,
G P Peacock
Wakefield WF1 5AG

*Opinion on SSI's **Battles of Napoleon** is divided, with most taking the view that it is a tad unwieldy. Watch out for **L'Empereur** from Koei later this year. There are very few Second World War games featuring Japan; of the ones currently available I would recommend SSI's **Typhoon of Steel.** The best modern wargame is probably **Overrun** which was reviewed in* SP *issue #2. Otherwise try **Command HQ** – lousy AI but great for modem play.*

PC plus

Could you please answer the following: 1) Which is the best computer for flight simulations, money no object? 2) Which is the best graphics card and is it used for flight sims? 3) Which is the best soundboard, and can it better the Amiga sound chip? 4) In some magazines they say that flight sims on the Amiga are faster and have better graphics than it a PC. How is this possible?

Gilbert Lo
Upton Park
London E13 05H

1) An IBM compatible 386/33 with Super VGA. There's no point in having a faster machine as it would be too fast for most sims.

2) 8514/A is about the best graphics card currently on the market, but no games that we know of use it. Even Super VGA is little exploited. In practical terms VGA is the most suitable for your application.

3) The Roland LAPC-1 is the best soundboard, though most boards can better the Amiga sound. However, if you plug a hi-fi lead into the back of your Amiga it should give your neighbours something to think about.

4) It is possible because most Amiga magazines are written and edited by pygmies. They believe that the machine they worship can do everything from butter bread to help secure a date with Madonna. Curious then, how these same magazines are all produced on Macs. But, ahem, to answer your question. No, the IBM PC is way ahead of the Amiga in terms of speed and a teeny weeny bit ahead on the visuals, assuming possession of a 16Mhz plus machine and a VGA graphics card. Plus, PCs usually come with a hard disk which provides a nice residence for your games.

When Saturday comes

I have just read your article on sports sims in issue 7 and have a question: has no one in your office ever heard of **Kick Off**? It would appear not. I would, therefore, suggest that you take Mr Walker, one Amiga and a copy of **Kick Off 2** and lock them in a room for however long it takes until Mr Walker swears blind that **Kick Off** is the greatest sports sim of them all (I actually think it is the greatest computer program of all time). Then replace the **Kick Off** disk with **Gazza II** and lock him away for a further week; this should be suitable punishment for using the word S****r. The game is called Football regardless of what the bloody Americans might think!

I was also none too impressed with some of what was said in your **MiG-29** review. You quite correctly pointed out to Jonathan Newth that 'Six missions is hardly enough to warrant the high price asked' to which he replied that they had wanted to do more but had run out of time. had it not occurred to them to simply reduce the price? And why should time be a limiting factor anyway. It's all right, we're all sensible mature people (those of us who don't read *Zero* are, anyway), we can wait! To add insult to injury Mr Newth later tells us that a full version of the game is to be released later in the year. So what he is saying is that **MiG-29** is incomplete and that a version containing all the missing bits is to be released later, but that they are still going to charge £35 for it anyway. Thanks for that, Jonathan, I bet everyone who has already forked out for the game feels a lot better now.

I reckon that £30 is about the acceptable limit for any game. I am quite prepared to pay this for something of the quality of **F-19 Stealth Fighter**, but it seems to me that with **MiG-29** we are being asked to pay more money for less game and I for one will not do so (and I bought my computer primarily to play flight sims).

David Glynn
South Gosford
Newcastle upon Tyne NE3 1SQ

*Your suggestion that I should be locked in a room with an Amiga and a copy of **Kick Off 2** is diabolical. Why not go the whole hog and throw Paint and Greasie in there as well? I played the original **Kick Off** and was unimpressed; mainly by the joystick skills required but also by the fact that the players resembled shellfish. I also tried **Player Manager** from the same company, this too left me cold. Being a Blackpool supporter I am only used to the best. The use of the dreaded term 's****r' was purely to distinguish between the inferior gridiron game and our own beloved sport.*

By the way, the Production Editor's brain/typing finger slipped last

Send your letters to:

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*issue in noting the price for **MiG-29**. It should have been £34.99, not £19.99 as printed.*

Reviewers blitzed

I had high hopes that a magazine devoted to both strategy board games and computer games would at last provide informed and informative comment on the kind of game the board wargamer is most interested in, the battle simulation with a computer opponent 'intelligent' enough to provide a challenging solo game, ie the equivalent of the computer chess program that enables the chess player to play alone and sharpen his ability.

By now your magazine has disillusioned me. Apart from what are essentially resource-management games (fine for those with that particular interest), strategy wargames are increasingly hard to find in your columns. I assume that few of these games are being produced (they are presumably hard to write), but your reviewers have to take some of the blame for the disappointing state of affairs. My justification for that? When strategy games are reviewed, the vital element – quality of the computer opponent – is ignored. Let me prove the point: in your review of **Blitzkrieg – May 1940** (issue 3) there is no mention of the computer opponent. Incredibly your reviewer ends by recommending readers to buy a board wargame instead, totally missing the point that what this game offers is precisely what no board game can give: the 'intelligent' opponent. This is simply inept. The giveaway comes early in the review, when the writer recommends the reader not to play against the Germans at level 3, because the player's army 'crumbles'. Doesn't it occur to him that he may have played badly? I have news for him. You can win at level 3. Of course, you have to accept initial losses (this *is* a simulation of May 1940!), manoeuvre skilfully and hold on until reinforcements become available, but that's what makes the game worth playing (not novel graphics and other gimmicks).

Your recent article on 'artificial intelligence' was welcome. Why can't we have reviewers who look for a bit of it in games, instead of looking for superficial novelty, just like the 'comics' that you scorn?

A M Wright
Halifax HX3 0SN

*I fail to see how our reviews (or reviewers) can be held responsible for the lack of computer wargames. Most board games offer a human opponent – are they not considered 'intelligent'? If you think we ignore the quality of computer opponents I suggest you reread the reviews of **Stratego, Battle Chess II, Worlds At War** among others.*

Artificial sweetener

I read with interest the Artificial Intelligence feature in issue 6 of *Strategy Plus*, it was fascinating. However, something not mentioned was how the AI can deal with certain situations extremely well but cope miserably with others.

One example of this is **Austerlitz** by by PSS. Orders are given to commanders, who interpret them and react accordingly with varying degrees of success. They support each other, give their own orders and manoeuvre troops on their own accord, but within the strategy you give them. Even divisional commanders order their units to change formation: column, line and square depending upon the current situation and this adds to the visual appeal of the game.

However, there is a minus side to this game: corps and even divisional commanders are never killed in combat, even if their own units are wiped out! They just wander the battlefield aimlessly or join another unit – either way, they play no more part in the game.

Another game which has a good and bad side to the AI is the elderly **Kampfgruppe**. During one game I moved a convoy of 30 german trucks to the front line by keeping them behind the contours of a hill so they'd be out of range of Russian small arms fire. The computer 'fired blind' with off-map artillery: although much of the bombardment was off target, a few lucky shells destroyed several of my trucks. Certainly this was good planning on the computer's part!

On the other side of the coin is the fact that the computerised forces are often unable to deal with rivers and other terrain features. In most games the computer – especially as the Russians – will attack and never retreat, even if the battle is going badly. This causes problems with its strategies. When Russian tanks break through the Nazi line they continue to advance, allowing the German survivors to attack from the rear. During the longer games, the computer tends to run low on ammunition by continually engaging enemy forces in long range firefights.

It may seem a little unfair commenting on such an old title but hopefully the programmers will learn from their mistakes and upgrade the AI in future releases. This would be a great idea, even if 1Mb of extra memory is needed, as in **Fire Brigade** by Panther Games.

S N Hardy
Wales
Sheffield S31 8LZ

Educating Archie

Judging by some of the letters you get, it would appear that we gamers are a very reactionary lot. In order to counteract that image, can I just say that many of us find the editorial line of *SP* a refreshing change from the jingoism that seems the norm in the media? Keep it up.

I started buying your mag in the *Games International* days for the boardgame reviews and still find it a good read even though board games are no longer given the space they deserve. However, I would enjoy *SP* even more if your computer game coverage was a little more extensive.

I own an Acorn Archimedes and find it frustrating to read the reviews of so many excellent games for other machines without a mention of mine. While I understand that the volume of games releases for those computers is much greater than that for the Arch, it is by no means the case that the latter is unsupported in the type of software you review and the situation is steadily improving as more companies begin to take notice of this excellent computer (helped by the release of the lower-cost A3000 last year).

Would it not be possible for you to try to include at least one Archimedes review in each issue of your magazine?

Trevor Clarke
Leen Valley
Nottingham NG5 5GX

I agree that the Archie is an excellent machine; unfortunately its software support is abysmal. If it is subsequently discovered that a reasonable number of our readers own these machines then we will review the games that are available for it.

Pub news

On your letters page there is mention of the dearth of specialist games magazines catering for boardgames, so I thought I should update you on the new (quarterly/occasional) publication that we are preparing at this moment.

continued on page 65

WANTED Amiga games: strategy/simulations/RPGs and Adventure must be cheap. Contact Andrew, tel 061-428 0085, or write to 856 Kingsway, E Didsbury, Manchester M20 0WQ.

ST SOFTWARE for sale: **Balance of Power, Colossus Chess, Elite, Gato, Joan of Arc, TV Sports Football, UMS, Vulcan**. All are boxed originals. Offers to D Taylor, 203 Ditchfield Road, Widnes, Cheshire.

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FOR SALE: Over 50 board wargames ranging from **Junta** to **Tac Air**. **Siege of Jerusalem** to **Tactics II**. Entire collection to go £5 to £20. Plus lots of boxed ST software at £10. Send SAE for complete list. Mike Souber, Cherry Hill, Portnall Drive, Wentworth, Virginia Water, Surrey GU25 4NN.

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AMIGA and Commodore games for sale: **Might & Magic** (C64/128) £7, **Defender of the Crown** (C64/128) £7, **Questron** (C64) £7, **Shard of Spring** (C64) £7; **Swords of Twilight, Questron II, Star Command, Dungeon Master, Gold of the Americas, Demon's Winter, Annals of Rome, Roadwar 2000, Roadwar Europe** (all Amiga 500 games) all £10 each. Contact Dave, tel 081-341 5915.

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BOARD WARGAMES for sale: SPI, Avalon Hill etc. Many no longer available new. Send SAE for list of 30+ games to Karl Wass, 20 Dorset Close, Rubery/Rednal, Birmingham B45 0NL.

FOR SALE: loads of Amiga games, most in mint condition. Titles includes **Waterloo, Gettysburg, Austerlitz, Escape From Colditz, Kick Off 2, Tracksuit Manager, Conflict In Europe** and **Manchester United**. For printed list of prices write to Stuart Hardy, 33 Fir Tree Drive, Wales, Sheffield S31 8LZ.

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Rebound, continued

The editor/publisher is Roy Sheppard, and the mag is the voice of Institute of Independent Inventors of Boardgames. Subscription to III is £10 pa. Format of the mag is A5, and distribution is through subscription, and discretionary trade circulation. There are no plans at present for newstrade distribution... but any individual is free to subscribe. The III is also organising some social events, mainly in London, to compete with SIGMA.

My position is that of news editor, typesetter, printer and distributor.

Steve Nicholls
Quorum Game Development Services
Lowestoft
Suffolk NR33 7NE

PC plod

After reading your excellent magazine I began to realise that as a strategy/RPG fan I had made the wrong choice in buying an Atari ST. The ideal choice would seem to be a PC, but I'm rather confused as to the hundreds of makes on offer, their 'speeds', different graphics and soundboards etc.

Would it be possible to print some kind of hardware guide to explain all the different characteristics? I'm sure many newcomers to the hobby would find it useful.

In the meantime, keep up the good work, and don't forget the poor old ST.

Trevor Parrish
Walthamstow
London E17 9JJ

We'll be publishing a special feature on PCs and their application as a games machine in our next issue. SP

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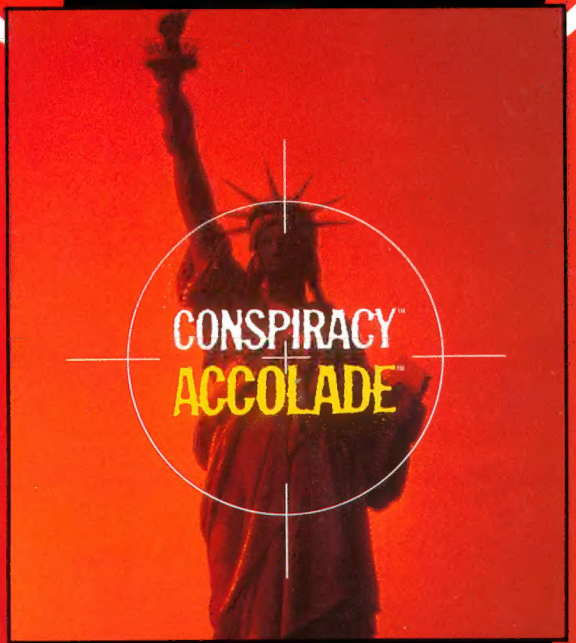

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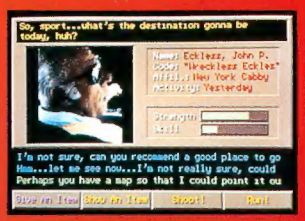
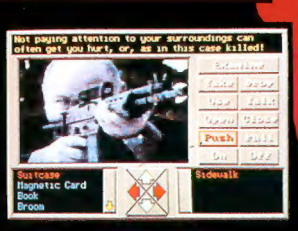
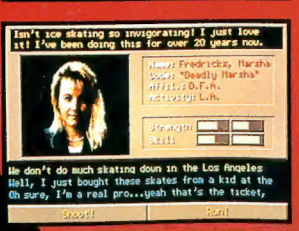

So, sport...what's the destination gonna be today, huh?
I'm not sure, can you recommend a good place to go
Hmm...let me see now...I'm not really sure, could
Perhaps you have a map so that I could point it ou

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